

**Structuring**  
**The Notion of ‘Ancient Civilisation’ through Displays:**  
**Semantic Research on Early to Mid-Nineteenth Century**  
**British and American Exhibitions of**  
**Mesoamerican Cultures**

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**I, Emma Isabel Medina Gonzalez, confirm that the work presented in this thesis is my own. Where information has been derived from other sources, I confirm that this has been indicated in the thesis**

  
Signature

This thesis is dedicated to my grandparents  
Emma and Andrés, Dolores and Concepción:  
their love has borne fruit

Esta tesis está dedicada a mis abuelos  
Emma y Andrés, Dolores y Concepción:  
su amor ha dado fruto

Al 'Pipila' porque él supo lo que es  
cargar lápidas

To 'Pipila' since he knew the burden of  
carrying big stones

## ABSTRACT

This research focuses on studying the representation of the notion of ‘ancient civilisation’ in displays produced in Britain and the United States during the early to mid-nineteenth century, a period that some consider the beginning of scientific archaeology. The study is based on new theoretical ground, the Semantic Structural Model, which proposes that the function of an exhibition is the loading and unloading of an intelligible ‘system of ideas’, a process that allows the transaction of complex notions between the producer of the exhibit and its viewers.

Based on semantic research, this investigation seeks to evaluate how the notion of ‘ancient civilisation’ was structured, articulated and transmitted through exhibition practices. To fulfil this aim, I first examine the way in which ideas about ‘ancientness’ and ‘cultural complexity’ were formulated in Western literature before the last third of the 1800s. This results in a basic conceptual structure about the notion of ‘ancient civilisation’, which is then analysed in relation to the representations formulated by eight displays on Mesoamerican objects, monuments, and people that date from the 1820s to 1870s, all which have been poorly studied up until now.

This work is an original approximation of the history of Mesoamerican archaeology that concludes that early to mid-nineteenth century British and American exhibits structured some aspects of the notion of ‘ancient civilisation’ for the representation of Pre-Columbian cultures by articulating a language code composed of a set of conceptual traits. It also shows that the representation of the notion of ‘ancient civilisation’ through Mesoamerican exhibits was a complex, problematic and changing phenomenon. On one hand, it involved the use of visual, textual, spatial, object-based and performative display technologies and, on the other, the ideas articulated by the displays developed together with the theoretical, conceptual, informational, and socio-political transformations of the era.

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## CHAPTER I

### Introduction: Research Concepts and Framework

This research is a library and archive-based study within the field of ‘archaeological representation’ (Moser 2001). It focuses on analysing the representation of the notion of ‘ancient civilisation’ in displays produced in Britain and the United States during the early to mid-nineteenth century, a period that some consider the beginning of scientific archaeology (Cf. Daniel 1973, 1978, 1981; Willey & Sabloff 1974; Bernal 1980; Trigger 1989). Until now, communication, signification, and representation approaches have generated partial, and thus, limited models for understanding displays (Chapter 2).

This study is based on new theoretical grounds, namely Structural Semantics, for the conceptualization and examination of exhibits. Building on previous theoretical approaches to communication, signification, and representation in displays, the Semantic Structural Model proposes that the function of an exhibition is the loading and unloading of an intelligible ‘system of ideas’, a process that facilitates the transmission of complex notions between the producer of the exhibit and its viewers.

Based on semantic research, my investigation evaluates how the notion of ‘ancient civilisation’ was structured, articulated and transmitted through exhibition practices, including various written, visual, spatial and performance display technologies. I first examine the way in which ideas about ‘ancientness’ and ‘cultural complexity’ were formulated in Western literature before the last third of the 1900s in order to propose a basic conceptual structure of the notion of ‘ancient civilisation’ (Chapter 3). I then analyse this basic structure in relation to the representations formulated by a group of theme-related exhibits: eight displays on Mesoamerican cultures presented by and for British and American audiences from the 1820s to 1870s, a historical phenomenon poorly documented and studied until now (see Chapter 4, 5, 6). The investigation examines the way in which these historical exhibitions, put objects, monuments and people on display in order to show different but limited cultural dimensions of Pre-Columbian archaeology.

From the 1820s to the 1870s, British and American exhibits structured some aspects of the notion of ‘ancient civilisation’ for the representation of Mesoamerica by articulating a language code composed of a set of conceptual traits, which included ideas about time-distance and remoteness, chronological rupture, technological achievements, art, monumentality, urbanism, solid architecture, decadence, ‘noble’ or ‘degenerate’ indigenous people, and heroic archaeologists (Chapter 7). Representing the notion of ‘ancient civilisation’ through

Mesoamerican exhibits was a complex, problematic and changing phenomenon. On one hand, the ideas articulated by the displays were developed together with the theoretical, conceptual and informational advances of the era. On the other hand, the exhibits reflected some socio-political agendas from the corresponding historical context.

### **1.1. GENERAL BACKGROUND**

Recent post-modern theorising, particularly that derived from post-structuralism, has led to a 'crisis' in Western paradigms of 'Reason' and 'Science' (Reynoso 1991: 17). As part of this process, an 'anthropology of anthropology' has emerged, which critically reflects on the constructive nature of this discipline (Reynoso 1991: 28). This pluralistic and fragmented intellectual critique has often taken the shape of de-constructivist analysis that aims to dismantle anthropology's intellectual imperialism (Fabian 1983:164). Whereas Geertz (1973) initially developed an interpretative theory of culture that considered 'culture as text', critical anthropologists later promoted the project of examining 'texts about culture' (e.g. Marcus 1980; Marcus and Cushman 1982; Fabian 1983, Clifford & Marcus 1984; Clifford 1988; Geertz 1988). The aim of these authors has been to examine anthropological discourse by rejecting the transparency of the representation and the immediacy of the experience; hence, their works have analysed how anthropological practice/writing produces its disciplinary knowledge and its objects of study. As a result of this academic enquiry, scholarly literature on meta-anthropology has shown an increasing awareness regarding the social construction of categorisations, concepts and notions that have been conventionally employed during disciplinary anthropological arguments.

From a retrospective point of view, some histories of anthropological ideas have proved that key disciplinary categories, including those of 'culture', 'primitive society' and 'ethnography' have been invented, inscribed and manipulated by scholars throughout history (Kuper 1988; Mazlish 2004; Rapport & Overing 2000). Not only have these exercises provided concise repositories of definitions covering the major concepts developed by anthropology, but they have also developed arguments concerning the ways in which anthropologists have understood the key notions crafted or employed by their discipline over time (Rapport & Overing 2000: vii). Furthermore, the study of Kuper (1988) has demonstrated that, although many influential anthropologists developed distinctive conceptualisations for 'Primitive Society', some core elements of meaning have persisted over time.

The above studies have entailed predominantly academic documents. However, some cultural anthropologists have recently examined visual media of anthropological discourse such as images, photography, film, and performance (e.g. Clifford 1988; Taylor 1994; Deveraux & Hillman 1995; Banks & Morphy 1997). Furthermore, after decades in which anthropological

museums not only declined but were also considered either irrelevant or of little importance for research, scholars from the 1980s began to reassess the importance of displaying practices for the development of anthropology (Stocking 1985a: 9). Reassessment was accompanied by re-thinking the nature of anthropological exhibits, their problems in representing non-Western cultures, the political implications of the representations, and the power of exhibitions for formulating meaning and knowledge about cultural differences and 'otherness' (e.g. Karp & Lavine 1991; Ames 1992; Lidchi 1997; Hallam & Street 2000a; Sherman 2008; Jordanova 2000). So far, one of the most challenging arguments in this respect is posed by Karp & Kartz (2000: 199) who argue that the 'ethnographic' and 'tribal' are more than specific topics for museum exhibitions, since they constitute 'background categories' against which some anthropological displays are made meaningful. From this standpoint, these investigators have analysed how 'ethnographic frameworks' have been articulated by displays, which have historically constituted a certification of knowledge for the construction of cultural 'Otherness'.

The interdisciplinary nature of anthropology means that there has been a constant flux of ideas between specialities (Banks & Morphy 1997: 1). Hence, following the climate of self-revision and criticism derived from the emergence and the consolidation of post-processual approaches, archaeologists have also shown an increasing interest in re-assessing the interpretive process of their practice, an exercise accompanied by studies that examine how archaeology interpreted and represented the past. An initial stream of these studies explored the political or ideological implications of archaeological interpretations and the effects of their dissemination (e.g. Leone 1981; Patterson 1995; Gathercole & Lowenthal 1990; Gero 1985; Kohl & Fawcett 1995; Diaz-Andreu 2007). From this standpoint, some scholars have developed analyses of the ways in which archaeological discourses have been constituted through academic endeavour (e.g. Hodder 1986; Tilley 1991, 1999; Shanks 1992; Shanks & Hodder 1995; Shanks & Tilley 1993, Tilley 1993). Accordingly, new histories of archaeology have abandoned narratives that emphasised new discoveries or fresh research techniques in order to analyse how archaeological thought has evolved throughout history (Trigger 1980) and how interpretative paradigms have developed to 'create the past for ourselves through archaeological practice' (Renfrew 1996: iii).

From the 1960s onwards, archaeologists have increasingly paid attention to the conceptual underpinnings of their interpretations, a programme that included examining the nomenclature created and employed by their professional argot. A precursor of this trend of inquiry was G. Daniel's study on the *Idea of Prehistory* (1962), which analysed the etymology and changes of meaning that the notion of 'Prehistory' experienced after it first appeared in mid-1800s academic literature. Ten years later, Chippindale (1988) examined key modifications in the interpretative framework of the 'Prehistoric past' from its inception to the present, but with a rather constructivist perspective. A recent study by Ferguson (1993) has proposed a way

forward by arguing that words cannot be equated with ideas, a principle that he used in his study on perceptions of prehistory from the Renaissance onwards.

Daniel (1978: 18-35) and Bodley (1994: 152-164) have also carried out historical reviews of the signification of the category of 'civilisation', following historicist and constructivist approaches, respectively. Apart from pointing out that it is quite natural that individual archaeologists have produced their own definitions of this notion according to disciplinary developments, these investigators have concluded that conceptual modifications in the definition of a 'civilisation' derived from the socio-political agendas that dominate a given period of time.

Some archaeologists have recently begun to scrutinise categories that have a long ancestry in the representation of the past. For instance, Lowenthal (1985: 78-90) produced a series of philosophical arguments regarding the characteristics, benefits, burdens and complexities at the core of the idea of 'antiquity'. Influenced by these ideas, Golden & Toohley (1997: 2) have also proposed that the 'ancient world' is an invention. However, how the 'ancient world' is created and recreated through archaeological practices is still a matter that requires research.

The analysis for most of the above investigations has been developed on the basis of academic written texts. However, this tendency has shifted over the last twenty years. Some researchers have analysed popular representations of the past consisting of atlases, magazines, and children's books, proving that their syntheses, attractive language and wider dissemination are key to shaping the public perception of archaeology and the past (e.g. Scarre 1990; Gero & Root 1990; Evans 1983; Gildwood 1984; Landau 1991; Burt 1987). Even though 'archaeology has a long history of using non-verbal media for projecting ideas about the past' (Champion 1997: 213), for many years visual language remained a topic largely neglected by archaeologists (see Chapter 2). Nevertheless, over the last ten years research on 'archaeological representation' has developed to constitute a rich field of scholarly research among both archaeologists and other professionals (Moser 2001). The acceptance of the study of visual representations in our discipline can be evidenced by its incorporation in congresses (i.e. TAG 2000, Non-Verbal-Communication in Archaeology), in university courses (MA in Art and Archaeological Representation, University of Southampton) and in theoretical forum contributions (Hodder 2001). Furthermore, a growing body of literature has focused on both academic and non-academic visual representations of the past, analysing a great variety of media, including imagery (Gifford Gonzalez 1993; James 1997; Molineaux 1997; Moser 1992, 1993, 1996, 1998, 2001; Grazia 1999; Myrone 1999; Smiles 1994, 1999; Haycock; Bending 1999; Smiles & Moser 2005; Privaterr 2005; Pratt 2005, Arnold 92; Dixon 2005; Smiles 2005; Bohrer 2005; Bateman 2005), digital media and multimedia (e.g. Dingwall et. al. 1999; Earl 2005; Gillings 2005), souvenirs (Beard 1992), films (e.g. Piccini 1996; Serceu 1982; Solomon 1998; Wyke 1997), site presentations (e.g. Stone and Molineaux 1994; MacManus 1996; Killerbrew & Lehmann 1999), re-enactments (Samson 1996), and performances (Prettejohn 1999; Ucko 2000).



Displays have not traditionally been considered a matter of serious research. There are many reasons for this. First, displays have often been associated with visual representations, and thus, with the derogative perceptions related to them (see Chapter 2). In addition, as Moser (2001: 263, 2006: 3) has recently stated, exhibitions have conventionally been dismissed as popular representations since they are not ‘authored in the same way as academic texts’. Furthermore, many scholars assume that although exhibits can shape public perception, they do not influence scholarly developments. Many of these views, however, are but misconceptions resulting from the lack of proper and systematic investigation of exhibitions.

Fortunately, fresh developments in the study of a display’s communication, signification and representation (see Chapter 2) have proved that exhibits are an important medium for the representation of the past for both academic and popular audiences. In particular, it has been convincingly shown that exhibitions are complex, informational productions of a high-level of competence, which serve to shape new interpretations. Displays are theory-laden and have played an important role in the making of disciplinary knowledge in archaeology (Gamble 1992; Moser 1992, 1993a, 1993b). However, ‘we still know very little about the way in which displays contribute to the process of creating knowledge’ of the past (Moser 2006: 2).

Research on this topic can work in many directions. For instance, archaeologists need to investigate how display strategies construct implicit classifications that are taken for real and thus amply employed for transmitting, shaping, and/or constituting archaeological knowledge (Karp & Kartz 2000: 201). As part of this, scholarly research must also focus on analysing how exhibition strategies assist viewers to read and understand these categories. We must also investigate how audiences respond to these categories by accepting them, responding to them, or making their own interpretations. In addition, as Karp & Kartz (2000: 202) have pointed out, there is ‘a fascinating history that remains to be written: one that shows how exhibition technologies pass back and forth among museums, in museum-like and non-museum settings. Hence, research on displays needs to examine how different display settings structure a given archaeological notion, thus helping to consolidate its signification through different media that employ textual, visual, spatial, and/or performative strategies.

An integrated analysis of these issues seems promising because it can help to understand the manner in which different exhibition spaces and display languages formulate, shape or disseminate notions that serve to construct the past. It can also shed light on the processes by which archaeological concepts have become known and gained acceptance among academics and in society. However, up to now, an integrated research to investigate how displays contribute to formulating, articulating and transmitting archaeological notions through different types of exhibit settings and over a certain period of time has not been pursued.

Indeed, this integrated research demands new theoretical, methodological and documentary approaches to study display practices for three reasons:

Firstly, up until now, communication, signification and representation approaches have generated partial and thus limited models for understanding displays (Chapter 2). Hence, we need to move towards models that help us to comprehend the complex dynamics that exhibitions employ to convey ideas.

Secondly, it is necessary to develop a clear methodology for de-constructing exhibition practices, which focus on issues of production, representation, and interpretation, an exercise that allows us to comprehend how the exhibition is created to formulate 'ideas', how producers of the display make these 'ideas' intelligible for audiences, and how different types of public interpret these 'ideas'. As such, the methodology must guide us to use a research that is not common: how displays work for translating intended messages that the producers formulate to transmit to the public.

Thirdly, the research needs to compare the way in which different types of display are used when articulating a common topic, an issue that means that we have to expand the limited scope maintained by the large body of literature on museum studies, which has mainly concentrated on the history of institutional museums or exhibitions produced by academics. Therefore, independent exhibitions, informal displays and other types of spectacles (e.g. World Fairs, sideshows, and circuses) ought to be examined in a comparative fashion so as to unravel the underpinnings of the archaeology that lay at their conceptual cores.

Points of departure for this integrated research can be found in four different, but rather overlapping, research topics: nineteenth-century displays and the shaping of archaeology, the notion of 'ancient civilization' within archaeology, the conceptual and historical development of archaeology of 'ancient civilisations' during that same period and, 1800s displays on 'ancient civilisations'.

### **1.1.1. Nineteenth-century displays and the shaping of archaeology**

Bennett's (1998) conception of the 'exhibitionary complex' refers to nineteenth-century ways of producing and viewing exhibitions that were crucial for the consolidation of professional practices into disciplinary machines of knowledge. For instance, with regard to anthropology, Bennett (1998: 77) argues that from the late 1700s onwards, displays latched onto pre-existing forms of displaying the 'Other' by adding a temporal dimension. As a consequence:

Victorian ethnographic displays: 'typically represented [contemporary non-Europeans] as the still living examples of the earliest stage of human development... the point of transition between nature and culture. Denied of any history of their own, the fate of the "primitive people" was to

be dropped to the bottom of human history in order to ... representationally support ... the history of progress by serving as its counterparts' (Bennett 1998: 78).

Victorians seem to have developed a high degree of confidence in the powers of progress of their era (Lowenthal 1985: 101). Errington (1998: 14) has argued that during the second half of the nineteenth century, the 'narrative of progress' became the accepted, mainstream and scientific account for present differences among socially, racially and naturally observed entities. Accordingly, many famous and popular exhibitions of nineteenth-century Britain and the United States celebrated 'progress' and constituted a lesson in 'human progress' (Stocking 1987: 3). The idea and representation of progress also served to reassure Victorians of the belief in their right to expand and dominate others, by reassuring 'themselves that they were transporting a beacon of civilisation around of the world (McKenzie 2001: 253). By showing that the 'exhibitionary complex' served to articulate the notions of 'primitive people' within a great narrative of progress, Bennett (1998: 78) has hence demonstrated that displaying practices not only consolidated anthropology as a discipline, but also made anthropology representations and conceptualisations relevant in sociological terms.

Few scholars have analysed how displays participated in the construction of categories that have been central to archaeological development. Indeed, studies of exhibitions on hominid ancestors (Gamble 1992; Moser 1992; 1993a, 1993b, 1998, 2001; Scott 2005) have helped us to comprehend how these subjects were represented through three-dimensional display strategies, and shed light on how the categories of the Prehistoric past made use of a series of conventions that were consolidated over time, in spite of cosmetic or paradigmatic changes. However, research on the displaying of other types of archaeological pasts is still at a rather embryonic stage. A paradigmatic example of this is the past configured by those societies that archaeologists have historically associated with the notion of 'ancient civilisation'.

### **1.1.2. The notion of 'ancient civilisation' within archaeology**

The notion of 'ancient civilisation' is a social category that is widely employed by archaeologists, anthropologists, historians, and other professionals. This notion is also characterised by persistence and notoriety in academic literature through time. Additionally, the term is commonly employed by popular archaeological productions with wide dissemination such as magazines, children's books, television programmes, films, and computer media.

The notion of 'ancient civilisation' is of considerable importance for the conceptual and historical development of archaeology. Diaz-Andreu (2007: 2) has argued that the very roots of archaeology –from the Greek *arkhaiologia*– refer to the study of what is 'ancient'. Through time, archaeologists and other scholars have studied diverse aspects of 'ancient civilisations', posing a large number of interpretations which, in turn, have been assessed, examined and scrutinised by

historians of archaeology (e.g. for ancient Egypt: Clayton 1982; David 2000; for Ancient Assyria: Bohrer 1998, 2003; for Ancient Mesoamerica see Keen 1973; Briggs 1986).

However, the notion of 'ancient civilisation' has not been subjected to scholarly scrutiny from the perspective of its meaning. No systematic attempt has been carried out to study the changes that its signification may have experienced through time. As a consequence, the theoretical underpinnings of this notion have often been taken for granted and its conceptual implications remain largely obscure. Yet, it is certain that studying ancient civilisations has been extremely important for the development of archaeology, both as a scholarly discipline and as a branch of knowledge (for a review see Diaz-Andreu 2007), particularly during the nineteenth century.

### **1.1.3. The development of the archaeology of 'ancient civilisations' in the nineteenth century**

The origins of archaeology are still being debated. Different opinions rest on the way in which archaeology is conceptualised. Diaz-Andreu (2007: 3) has proposed that the archaeology emerged as a discipline in the twentieth century. Renfrew & Bahn's seminal study (1991: 22) argues that 'the discipline of archaeology was truly established in the nineteenth century'. However, taking into account sociological analyses of the formation of intellectual communities, Levine (2002: 6, 39) has recently proposed that the division among antiquarians, historians and archaeologists did not crystallise until the late Victorian period. For Daniel (1962: 23), archaeological practice came into being in the eighteenth century, when 'material remains were studied and collected by men who were consciously trying to wrest historical facts'. However, by considering archaeology as the conscious and methodical double act of digging to activate memory and of restoring monuments to install a tangible sign of ancient time within a landscape, Schnapp (1996: 12-17) has traced back the birth of archaeology to the sixth century. Indeed, by taking a broader definition of archaeology as the conscious activity of interpreting the past through its material remains, one can conclude that Nabonidus (556-539 B.C.) and his team of scholars inaugurated the archaeological investigation of 'ancient civilisations' when they found and deciphered an inscription that dated back to the times of the first Babylonian Empire (Cf. Schnapp 1996: 13).

Ample evidence indicates that from this moment onwards and in various parts of world, monuments and remains of various ancient civilisations began to be employed for studying the past (Trigger 1989: 29-31; Schnapp 1996: 17-130). Greek, Roman and Egyptian material culture was investigated and collected by Europeans for different purposes during the Medieval Era (Trigger 1989: 31-35; Schnapp 1996: 80-118). The Classical Mediterranean civilisations (Greece and Rome) and Ancient Egypt formed a strong part of European culture throughout its modern history, with high points of interest during the Renaissance and Enlightenment periods (Greene

1983: 35; Bernal 1987: 121-215). During the eighteenth century, archaeological interest in the material culture of these civilisations took the form of survey-exploration and some excavation of several archaeological sites, which resulted in a large body of studies of both ancient monuments and antiquities in several countries (Greene 1983: 27-33; Trigger 1989: 55-102; Schnapp 1996: 130-225). From the eighteenth century onwards, the appreciation of Greek and Roman art assumed a tangible form as private collections of Classical and Egyptian antiquities, which were displayed in the properties of nobility, the aristocracy and other powerful members of European society (Jenkins 1992: 16; Scarre 1990: 12; Curl 1994: xvii; Moser 2006: 5). Some of these collections were later incorporated in important Western public museums, which were founded from the 1750s onwards, including the British Museum and the Louvre (Caygill 1996: 3-38; Schnapp 1996: 295; Moser 2006: 5).

Historians of archaeology have often recognised that the nineteenth century was a period of significant importance for the development of archaeology. For instance, Stiebing (1994: 23-24) argues that early nineteenth-century archaeological studies and excavations laid the foundation for widespread archaeology during the rest of the century; a process that resulted in archaeology's maturity around the 1860s. It has also been argued that during the first half of the 1800s, the very term archaeology began to be increasingly used and 'this shift in vocabulary corresponded to a modification in the role and purpose of the knowledge of the past' (Schnapp 1996: 275). According to Schnapp (1996: 275), this transformation eventually led to the formulation of studies that, on the basis of typological, stratigraphic and technological studies of past remains, created a new branch of scholarly discipline: archaeology. This view concurs with Daniel's (1981) idea that nineteenth-century advances on biological, geological and curatorial thinking provided the kick-start for scientific archaeology. This field of knowledge gained professional recognition in the same century, when schools and later universities opened formal educational courses, thus consolidating the discipline of archaeology (Schnapp 1996: 303-321). Indeed, from the 1870s onwards, archaeology came to 'signify a trained and respectful profession' (Levine 1982: 36, 39).

A number of historians (Daniel 1981; Green 1983; Schnapp 1996; Trigger 1980; Stiebing 1994) place the roots of modern archaeology at the foundations of global prehistory. Nevertheless, they also recognise that the nineteenth century constitutes a period of enormous progress in the field of historical, Classical, Near Eastern, and Egyptian archaeology, a branch of studies that Schnapp (1996: 321) identifies with the development of 'philological archaeology'. Indeed, the late eighteenth-century Napoleonic campaigns prompted an explosive interest in Ancient Egypt, which developed in various waves during the nineteenth century among Europeans (Curl 1994: xvi, Grimal 1992: 8). At the same time, a wide range of Western scholars rigorously investigated not merely Rome itself, but the long-buried remains of Herculaneum and Pompeii, as well as Etruscan tombs (Vance 1997: 21). Major investigations also took place of Greek archaeological

sites (Diaz-Andreu 2007: 31). Furthermore, a number of investigations showed that from the 1800s onwards, archaeology expanded to many areas of the world, including those once occupied by the ancient civilisations of China, Japan, the Near East, and Mesoamerica (Scarre 1994: 12; Daniel 1975: 21-22, 259; Bernal 1980: 67-129; Diaz-Andreu 2007: 17). In fact, according to Stocking (1987: 71), the mid-nineteenth century witnessed a burgeoning interest in ancient civilisations in many Western countries, particularly in Britain and the United States. Considering the socio-political context in which archaeology has developed, a number of essays edited by Diaz-Andreu (2007) have recently analysed the relationship that some archaeological investigations of ancient civilisations had with nationalist, imperialist, colonialist and informal-imperialist agendas.

Nineteenth-century archaeological investigations of ancient civilisations generated a considerable number of findings, predominantly artefacts and statuary, which were often collected and, eventually, displayed in Britain, United States, and other Western countries.

#### **1.1.4. Displaying ‘ancient civilizations’ during the 1800s**

According to Daniel (1975: 21-22, 68ff), the plunder, collecting and shipping of antiquities from the Mediterranean area, Egypt, and the Near East to Western Europe became a standard practice during the 1800s (Daniel 1975: 21-22, 68ff). These activities soon extended worldwide, as archaeology turned its attention to the ancient civilisations of China, India, and the Americas (Daniel 1975: 259).

A large body of literature has studied the history of these collections, explaining how they were amassed at their place of origin, examining the way in which they were incorporated into European museums, galleries and private repositories, and revealing the political agendas implicated in these processes (e.g. Hinsley 1985, 1991, 1993; Jenkins 1992; Williams 1985, 1993; Hill-Boone 1993, Fane 1993; Graham 1993; Morales-Moreno 1994a, 1994b, 1998; Cummins 1994; Moser 2006).

It is fairly well-documented that a great number of these collections were eventually put on display in great museums of the Western world (Daniel 1975: 21-22, 259; Caygill 1996: 3-38; Curl 1994: iv, Grimal 1992:8; Vance 1997: 21; Jenkins 1992: 18-211; Scarre 1990: 12; Schnapp 1996: 245; Bohrer 1998; Moser 2001, 2006; Gero & Rosen 2007: 2-18; Picon *et. al.* 2007: 3-19). Moser (2006: 5) has argued that ‘with the arrangement of substantial collections in the national museums of the nineteenth century, a major tradition in representing ancient cultures was firmly established’. However, as she rightly points out, very little is known about how these displays contributed to our understanding of ancient cultures and how the public response to these spectacles may have contributed to shaping ideas about ancient civilisations (Moser 2006: 5).

National museums were not the only spaces where ancient civilisations became the topics of exhibitions during the nineteenth century. Dioramas, the opera and theatre, freak-shows, phantasmagoria, sideshows and World Fairs were also used to represent ancient Egyptian, Greek, Roman, Assyrian and Mesoamerican cultures to a variety of audiences in the 1800s (for examples, see Wilcox 1988: 127-166; Braun 1993: 26-36; Said 1994: 133-157; Tenorio-Trillo 1996: 81-95, 170-171; Lant 1997: 72-90; Vance 1997: 11, Medina González 1998, 2003; Pearce 2000; Jackson 2001: 298-305; Bohrer 1998, 2003; Moser 2006). Although many of these spectacles are reported and documented in the literature, only a few have been subjected to proper analysis. The exceptions are the studies of the Egyptian and Assyrian Galleries at the British Museum and some displays of Mesoamerican cultures (Medina González 1998, 1999; Bohrer 1998, 2003; Moser 2006), which have examined the ways in which the exhibitions represented these cultures, their display technologies, and the relationship of the representations with broader disciplinary developments and some socio-cultural agendas of the nineteenth century. However, these studies have been partial since they have taken *specific* case studies or *particular* display settings as subjects of investigation.

The signification and importance of displaying ancient civilisations in nineteenth-century Western culture is still largely understudied. Exhibitions focused on these cultures are generally underrepresented in studies of the history of archaeology of the period (e.g. Diaz-Andreu 2007). An initial effort was made by Bennett (1998: 76), who studied the incorporation of archaeology within the development of the 'exhibitionary complex'. However, his conclusions tend to underestimate the importance of the displays on Greece, Rome, Egypt and Mesopotamia by arguing that they played a rather simple and peripheral role, which consisted in enlarging the 'vertical depth' in Western-European universal history'. However, this appreciation seems untenable in light of recent studies on both the conformation identity and the formulation of alterity in Western culture.

It is well accepted that the 'Victorian Era marked the climax of European exploration of the globe' (MacKenzie 2001: 244). Displays played an important role in mobilising the 'rest of the world' from the periphery to the metropolitan centres of the Western World (Jordanova 1989: 44). Furthermore, spectacles encouraged Victorians to develop a global view (MacKenzie 2001: 74) and enacted a spectacular way of framing the world as a collection of objects to be inspected, classified and catalogued (Mitchell 1988: 149). Archaeological displays of 'ancient civilisations' played a part in the formation of this Western global vision within a framework of historicism, for they presented an international perspective of the past, thus showing and formulating a global view of the 'ancient world' to Western audiences.

Exhibits also served to make ancient civilisations known to those who could not travel to see the actual sites. By presenting material culture and information, displays also facilitated the understanding of particular ancient civilisations, creating concrete visions about them, and

making information about the traits that characterised these past societies accessible (Moser 2006: 7). Therefore, these displays contributed to the shaping of knowledge about the past. In addition, the attraction held by displays of ancient civilisations caused increased public interest in, and support of, archaeological research (Stocking 1987: 71).

The representation of ancient civilisations played a fundamental role in nineteenth-century culture. Greece, the Near East and Egypt were regarded as part of 'Western heritage' as well as ancestors of modern European civilisation (Scarre 1990: 13; Wailes & Zoll 1995: 3; Diaz-Andreu 2007: 12). However, these cultures also played a significant role in the formulation of 'Otherness'. Indeed, the formulation of Ancient Greece as the childhood of Europe was accompanied by the depiction of 'modern Greece, in Byron's words, as the sad relic of a departed world' (Shanks 1996: 83). Similar interpretations were expressed in the images of ancient Egyptian monuments produced during the Victorian era, since they represented modern Egyptians as picturesque, degenerate 'human remnants', who 'were unable to emulate the grandeur of their ancestors' (Barringer 2001: 319). According to Barringer (2001: 319), these ideas were conveyed in the Egyptian Galleries of the British Museum at the time.

These interpretations and representations were highly political: they implied that the true heirs of the ancient Egyptians were the Europeans, rather than the contemporary African inhabitants, a formula that constitutes a binary formulation between the East and the West (Lant 1997: 82). Therefore, there is evidence indicating that nineteenth-century displays on ancient civilisations were involved in 'the anthropological problem of otherness, exoticism and alterity, which allowed European colonial powers to use other societies to define themselves' (Shanks 1996: 83). Indeed, the idealisation of 'ancient civilisations' by archaeological enquiry and displays constituted a way of framing and appropriating the past of the 'Other' in defining Western identity. This act of alterity was accompanied by a further transformation: the ancient world was configured as a manifestation of 'Otherness'. According to Errington (1998: 1-15), by the second half of the nineteenth century, 'progressivist historical narratives' consolidated long-established tripartite historical phases: savagery, barbarism, and civilisation; archaic, medieval, and modern. This generated a new meta-narrative that placed an axis of culture/nature, past/present times, and degrees of civilisation into a grid (see Figure 1).



Figure 1. The Nineteenth-Century Meta-Narrative of History, Progress, and Civilisation  
(From Errington 1998: 15)

This visual synthesis of the ‘meta-narrative of history, progress, and civilisation’ suggests that ‘archaic civilisations’ constituted an entity that mirrored the notions of primitive society and modern European civilisations. This view has been further elaborated by Golden & Toohley (1997: 2), who proposed that the ‘ancient world’ was an ultimate manifestation of ‘Otherness’ since it was constructed as inherently inaccessible and foreign. In light of these views, one can conclude that the notion of ‘ancient civilisations’ was considered a highly significant, yet ambiguous, conceptual configuration, which played on grey areas of identification/differentiation, the inner dynamics of which are still not well understood.

Victorians developed a great sense of antiquarian retrospection (Lowenthal 1985: 101). Since Classical Antiquity constituted an object of reverence, a model of greatness and exemplary virtues, it functioned not only as ‘the refuge from the all too new and disillusioning present’ but also as a reference for assessing the present (Lowenthal 1985: xxi). Furthermore, the Victorian climate of moral anxiety was often accompanied by reflecting upon the lessons learned from history, including those derived from the decay of ancient cultures.

During the nineteenth century, the ‘decline of a civilisation was invariably attributed to moral corruption: [therefore] ruins became metaphors for this inner decay’. By the 1800s, it was widely accepted that ‘London, the capital of a new Empire, would also lie in ruins one day’, just as every flourishing empire had experienced the inevitable decline and fall (Woodward 1999: 15). MacKenzie (2001: 253) has argued that as the British ‘Empire expanded to its full extent; [Victorians]’ fascination with the ancient and classical worlds [...] gave them a sense of a coming

nemesis'. This sentiment becomes more evident in the writings of Rudyard Kipling, who during Queen Victoria's Diamond Jubilee in 1897 warned that the British might one day be 'one with Niniveh and Tyre' (MacKenzie 2001: 253). Visual representations of ruins of ancient civilisations were exhibited in galleries, dioramas and panoramas, all forms of educational entertainment during the nineteenth century (Wilcox 1988: 127, 166). Hence, it could be argued that these displays also played a part in Victorian culture: they served to provoke concern about the future among those who remained apprehensive about the progress of their own society. In spite of the importance of the ideological role of 'ancient civilisations', the 'ancient world' and 'archaic civilisations' for nineteenth-century culture, there is no detailed study on how displays represented and contributed to disseminate these notions.

According to Karp & Kratz (2000: 199), the 'ancient' is another background category against which displays became meaningful. Some scholars have certainly explored how *specific* ancient civilisations such as the Egyptian (Moser 2006) Assyrian (Bohrer 1998, 2003) and the Mesoamerican cultures (Medina-González 1998, 1999) have been represented in displays. However, hitherto no study has specifically focused on the mechanics of representation of the notion of 'ancient civilisation' through displays. This is precisely the aim of this research.

## **1.2. RESEARCH AGENDA**

The purpose of this research is to explore the ways in which the notion of 'ancient civilisation' is structured as a framework or 'background category' in exhibitions (Karp & Kratz 2000: 199). It proposes that the idea of 'ancient civilisation' is formulated, articulated and transmitted through series of display technologies and strategies. It examines how these technologies and strategies were put into operation and how they produced representations. It also examines the resulting representations conveyed by the displays and the responses expressed by some members of the exhibits' audiences. As such, this investigation analyses how displays 'work': the way in which exhibits translate meaning, information and ideas from their producers to their spectators. Thus, on a general level, this investigation aims to address the following questions:

- How do displays represent past human societies as 'ancient civilisations'?
- How is the notion of 'ancient civilisation' formulated and transmitted through display technologies and strategies?
- How do displays on ancient civilisations participate in the articulation of archaeological knowledge about the past?

These issues are addressed by examining exhibitions on Mesoamerican cultures held in the United Kingdom and the United States during the early to mid-nineteenth century.

To examine these displays, this research follows six basic queries:

- How was the representation of Mesoamerica constructed through these exhibits?
- What ideas about these societies did the exhibits intend to transmit?
- How did the display technologies and strategies articulate representations of Mesoamerica?
- What was the relationship between these representations and contemporary studies and debates about Mesoamerican cultures?
- How did historical circumstances influence these representations?
- How did the public interpret these representations?

### 1.3 FOCUS

This research concentrates on the early to mid-nineteenth century displays of ‘Mesoamerican’ cultures produced in the United Kingdom and the United States.

Mesoamerica<sup>1</sup> is defined here according to the conceptualization of the cultural area initially proposed by Kirchhoff (2000 [1943]), which has been later on reworked into a concept operational for archaeology by Willey (1962, 1981); Litvak (1975); Blanton *et al.* (1993); Adams (2000, 2005); Joyce (2004); and Evans (2008). Hence, the term encompasses three meanings:

- It refers to those societies that inhabited a specific geographical and temporal space: the region from central, eastern, and southern Mexico to the northern extreme of Central America (including Guatemala, Belize, western Honduras and El Salvador) from 2000 BC to 1500 AD (Adams 2005: 6) (Figure 2).
- It corresponds to an interactive super-area, the unity of which can be defined not only by the presence of a shared set of cultural traits (Willey 1962: 90; Adams 2000: 7; Evans 2008: 19), but also by the operation of a normal-exchange system within its components: sub-areal or regional cultures with connections that can be traced by archaeologically controlled finds of artefacts (Litvak 1975: 91; Willey 1981:142).
- Hence, Mesoamerica is a dynamic archaeological category of a region in which Native American peoples were linked together by processes of commerce, stylistic interaction and, an intercommunication network of ideas (Blanton *et al.* 1984: 6; Joyce 2004: 4).

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<sup>1</sup> Mesoamerican and Pre-Columbian cultures are used here as synonymous. I have intentionally avoided using the term ‘Middle America’ since this corresponds to a larger geographical area than Mesoamerica which encompasses the region from the Sonoran Deserts of Mexico to the Isthmus of Panama (Evans 2008: 3).

Figure 2. Mesoamerica: Principal Cultures (From MacEwan 1994:13)

The concept of 'Mesoamerica' was not employed in nineteenth-century displays. However, it is useful for this research, since 1800s British and American exhibitions often displayed a whole range of artefacts from Mexico and the countries of Central America within the same setting, often making no discrimination between their cultural affiliations, sometimes implying relationships among sub-areal cultures and, on occasions, not acknowledging archaeological cultures today recognised as such, including the Maya. As it turns out, the artefacts were from sites that would now be considered culturally part of Mesoamerica. Thus, nineteenth-century exhibits could be considered forerunners of the scholarly tradition of Mesoamerican studies, one of the most important fields for archaeological research worldwide of the last one hundred years (see Gorestein & Foster 2002: 3).

Furthermore, although it can be argued that 'Mesoamerica' is still problematic as a criterion of inclusion (for example, is a site in eastern Honduras automatically outside the limits of Mesoamerica, or does it depend on the cultural features present?), the concept is widely known to apply to the geographic region from which the artefacts in the exhibitions in question derive.

'Mesoamerica' is also appropriate given the aims of this research since it is considered a key area for anthropological investigation; and theorising about cultural complexity, chronology and cultural change are all critical elements for understanding the notion of 'ancient civilisation'.

My choice in studying nineteenth-century British and American exhibitions on Mesoamerica can be seen to impose limits to my research. My rationale, however, is as follows:

- First, as explained before, the nineteenth century is considered a critical stage in the development of archaeology worldwide. Most histories of archaeology, however, concentrate on the late Victorian period, which may be due to the fact that it was during the second half of the nineteenth century when archaeology gained professional acceptance. The period between 1820 and 1870 has remained largely understudied, a circumstance that provides an opportunity to gain a broader understanding of the history of archaeology.
- Second, the period coincides with the development of what Bennett (1998) has identified as the ‘exhibitionary complex’. The relationship between this phenomenon and the development of archaeology constitutes an opportunity to study how displays constructed knowledge and what the ideological consequences were of this process in nineteenth-century British and American societies.
- Third, Daniel (1975: 20) considered that the revolution through archaeology in our knowledge of man’s earliest civilisations took place during the last third of the nineteenth century. Yet, as explained before, the early to mid-1800s was a period in which the archaeology of the world’s ancient civilisations flourished. Therefore, this research seeks to provide a deeper understanding of the times in which ‘ancient civilisations’ were a central topic for archaeological research, but influential theoretical studies on the theme, including the *Origin of Civilisation* (Lubbock 1870) and *Ancient Society* (Morgan 1877), had not yet synthesised comprehensive models for the notion of ‘ancient civilisations’. As such, this investigation aims to analyse the background of one of the key turning points in the history of archaeological theorising.
- Fourth, the fifty years between 1820 and 1870 constituted a period in which British and American citizens expressed a fresh interest in the cultures we now call ‘Mesoamerican’. In addition, this was the period in which the United Kingdom and the United States consolidated Mesoamerican archaeology, a phenomenon that led to the production of different types of exhibitions. The importance of these displays cannot be overestimated. It has been argued that the first exhibition in the world to be produced on the Aztecs was *Ancient Mexico*, a spectacle engineered by the English naturalist and showman, William Bullock, in London in 1824 (Medina Gonzalez 1998: 3, Chapter 3). Furthermore, *Modern Mexico*, a sister spectacle of *Ancient Mexico*, was the first ever exhibition that presented a living Mexican person in British history. A few years later, Charles Young presented a unique collection of Mexican antiquities in London presumably recovered during the Mexican-American War. Bullock’s and Young’s

collections of Pre-Columbian antiques were eventually incorporated into the Ethnographic Department of the British Museum, an institution that has the longest and most enduring history of collecting Mesoamerican material culture in Europe. By the 1860s, the British traveller, collector, and industrialist Henry Christy put the most impressive collection of Mesoamerican artefacts on display in his private premises in London. The British-American expedition of Stephens and Catherwood in Chiapas, Yucatan and Central America, which has been considered as heralding the birth of Mesoamerican archaeology (Willey & Sabloff 1974: 57; Daniel 1978: 271), was also the origin of various exhibits produced during the 1840s and the 1850s in New York City. Stephens' *Incidents* was also the point of departure of the first ever display on Mesoamerican living people, a spectacle that was presented in both the United States and the United Kingdom for more than fifty years (see Chapter 6). All these exhibitions have been largely unrepresented in histories of archaeology, studies about museums, and general analysis of displays. Therefore, this investigation focuses on exhibitions, which have been poorly analysed in anthropological literature.

- Lastly, this investigation examines the relationship between two dominant Western countries—the United Kingdom and the United States—and the non-Western locales of Mesoamerica: Mexico, Guatemala, Honduras, Belize (then British Honduras) and El Salvador. A large number of investigations on displays have integrated this axis into their analyses to show that the representation of non-Western cultures has been influenced by colonial or imperialist ideologies (e.g. Benedict 1983; Benedict 1983; Trigger 1984; 1989; Barringer & Flynn 1997; Mitchel 1988; Rydell 1984; Russell 1997; Willet 1990; Colkin 2008; Dias 2008; Jackins 2007). This research moves away from this tendency, focusing on the examination of the non-colonial relationship between the West and non-Western past cultures, examining its effects on nineteenth-century displays.

To summarise, the focus of this thesis is directed to the intersection of five fields of knowledge poorly studied or underrepresented in the scholarly literature in order to provide a fresh, integrated analysis of the history of archaeology.

#### 1.4. SCOPE

Eight case studies are examined in this thesis. As a whole, they represent the history of American and British exhibitions of Mesoamerica during the early to mid-nineteenth century. Table 1 summarizes the general data in chronological order, including production dates, producers' names, the date and place of the exhibition and the types of display.

<b>Table 1</b> <b>Early to Middle Nineteenth-Century Displays on Mesoamerica Produced in the United Kingdom and the United States</b>				
<b>Name</b>	<b>Date</b>	<b>Producer</b>	<b>Place</b>	<b>Types</b>
Ancient Mexico	1824	William Bullock	Egyptian Hall, London	Exhibition of Objects Display of Monuments
Modern Mexico	1824	William Bullock	Egyptian Hall, London	Show of people
Ancient and Modern Mexico	1825	William Bullock	Egyptian Hall, London	Exhibition of Objects Display of Monuments Show of people
Exhibition of Mexican Antiquities	1855	Charles Young Jr.	Pall Mall Galleries, London	Exhibition of Objects
Ethnography Collection	1865	Henry Christy	Victoria Street, London	Exhibition of Objects
British Museum. Ethnography Department	1800-1870	Various Curators, including A. Franks	British Museum, London	Exhibition of Objects
Cruger Island Monument	1860-1870	John Cruger	Cruger Island, New York	Display of Monuments
The Aztec Show	1853-1870	Various	Various premises in Boston, New York, Washington and London	Show of people

### 1.5. SOURCES OF INFORMATION

This research is based on sources of information rarely employed for investigation on the history of archaeology: catalogues, guidebooks, pamphlets, press reviews, and independent chronicles. These sources sometimes presented illustrative materials, such as engravings, photographs, sketches, or drawings; however, they are mainly constituted by written data. Most of the material is unpublished and resides in the archives of a variety of institutions, including museums, libraries, universities, city archives and governmental offices, such as the British Museum Archives, the British Library; the Royal Anthropological Society; the American Natural History Museum Archives; the Harvard University Library Archives, The New York Public Library, the Museum of the City of New York Archives; the New York Historical Society Archives; the Chicago City Archives, Peabody Museum Archives, and the Smithsonian Institute Archives.

All the above materials provided crucial insights into the history of displays, their production and issues about representation. Primary sources for analysing the interpretation of these displays by the public came from press reports, mainly newspaper and periodical articles;

however, some data were obtained from diaries, travel accounts and other types of personal accounts of visits to the exhibits.

## **1.7. CHAPTER BREAKDOWN**

This research is divided into seven chapters as follows:

This first chapter introduces the topic of this thesis, its background, its research agenda, and its documentary resources. It thus provides the reader with the key research concepts and framework.

Chapter 2 deals with theoretical and methodological issues at the core of the investigation. It begins by proposing a holistic conceptualisation of a ‘display, exhibition or exhibit’, which defines its components and its function. Theoretical understanding about display dynamics is later analysed in terms of three well-known approaches: communication, signification and representation. This critical review exposes the contributions of each approach, pointing out their respective strengths and limitations. This discussion serves to propose a new theoretical grounding for analysing displays, namely the Semantic Approach, the aim of which is to provide understanding of how displays work for translating ideas from their producers to their viewers. Semantic research also establishes a clear methodology for examining how the notion of ‘ancient civilisations’ was structured by exhibition strategies. This proposes that the definition of an initial structural code, which is tested against factual evidence, derived from the analyses of specific exhibitions: i.e. case studies. As a result of this evaluation, a structural code for the notion will be clarified. This chapter ends by proposing a method for examining the case studies, which examines three realms of displaying practices: the exhibit’s production, its representation and its interpretation by some members of the public.

The purpose of Chapter 3 is to define an initial structural code for the notion of ‘ancient civilisations’. This structural notion is configured on the basis of a review of bibliographic resources, which deal with the conceptual underpinnings of the concepts of ‘ancientness’ and ‘cultural complexity’. On the basis of this literary review, an initial list of structural elements of the notion of ‘ancient civilisations’ is defined. This basic structure is tested against the investigation of the production, representation, and interpretation of the eight exhibitions on Mesoamerica that are studied in the following three chapters.

Chapter 4 analyses four early to mid-nineteenth century exhibitions that display Mesoamerican objects and collections: William Bullock’s *Ancient Mexico* (1824), Charles Young’s *Exhibition of Mexican Antiquities* (1855); Henry Christy’s *Ethnographic Displays* (1865) and the history of the Pre-Columbian collections at the British Museum (1820-1870). The investigation focuses on studying collecting practices that were used for amassing Mesoamerican collections in the United Kingdom, as well as the way in which these collections were put on display in the above-



mentioned exhibits. It also explores how members of the public who attended the exhibitions responded to the ideas conveyed by the display strategies.

Chapter 5 explores two early to mid-nineteenth century exhibits of Mesoamerican monuments, a category that involves the representation of urban, architectural and sculptural achievements. It analyses the production process involved in crafting the different media that the producers employed to reproduce Pre-Columbian monuments, namely graphic documents, narratives, models of archaeological buildings and life-size representations of architectural features. It also examines the signification of the representations conveyed by these media, analysing some responses by the spectators that viewed the displays.

The human aspect of Mesoamerica is explored in Chapter 6, which studies two shows of people in which living individuals were represented as links to Pre-Columbian cultures. This study also serves to examine how interpretations of modern Mesoamerican Indians were incorporated into the representation of the notion of 'ancient civilisations' in 1800s displays. This chapter also provides insight on the representation of Mesoamerican people in academic auditions and how diverse scholars interpreted these cultures after the presentation of individuals.

Chapter 7 presents the final considerations of this investigation. It summarises issues of production, representation and interpretation of early to mid-nineteenth century exhibitions on Mesoamerica presented in the United Kingdom and the United States. The discussion is then focused on analysing how the notion of 'ancient civilisations' was structured by these displays. It also presents an analysis on the composite elements of the notion of 'ancient civilisations', a notion which displaying practices translated from the exhibits' producers to their spectators. As a consequence, this chapter clarifies the structural components of the 'notion of 'ancient civilisations'. It finally poses some ways forward that may direct future investigation on the general theme of this research.

## CHAPTER 2

### Theory and Method: Towards an Integrated model

Displays, exhibitions or exhibits (henceforth employed synonymously *contra* Dean 1994: 3) take immensely different sizes, forms, shapes and styles. Perhaps due to their variety, drafting a clear definition of what is an ‘exhibition’ (and what is not) has proved to be a difficult task. Indeed, even recent literature about museum displays provides no straightforward definition of the very subject of their research (e.g. Moser 2006: 2).

This research accepts a comprehensive definition of a display, which is understood as ‘a discrete event in which something is intentionally displayed to the viewer to fulfil a specific purpose’ (Belcher 1991: 37). This characterization embraces all of the types of exhibits and stresses their nature as ‘sites of spectacle’ (Hooper-Greenhill 2000: 14): in other words, three-dimensional places that operate in a particular public sphere.

Theoretical thinking allows us to move from the rather dry realm of definitions to the rich field of conceptualisations, which can shed light on the assumptions that underline the displays’ rationale. In addition, theorising often provides elements for further analysis of the ways in which exhibits operate; i.e. their inner dynamics.

Unfortunately, the literature about displays (including museum exhibits) is not always clear on their theoretical basis, perhaps because exhibits have not often been conceptualised as serious academic works. However, a number of theoretically informed scholars have recently conceptualised displays as ‘artefacts’, ‘fictions’ or ‘cultural creations’ to emphasise the fact that they are fashioned by human endeavour (e.g. Lidchi 1997: 177, Jerzy in Belcher 1991:42). Some have even considered the exhibit to be a specific ‘work of art’ (Sola 1992 in Pearce 1994c: 30). All these conceptualisations point to one fundamental assumption: displays employ artificial strategies that form part of a ‘system of theatrical artifice’ (Saumaurez-Smith 1989:19). Indeed, through scientific content and aesthetic eloquence, exhibits participate in the construction of ‘dreamlands’ (Kräuter 1995: 64) or ‘myths’ (Barthes 1993: 100-102).

In the light of these arguments, views claiming the existence of transparent (or pure) presentation of items in exhibitions (e.g. Mason 1998: 2; Veerhar & Meeter 1987: 3) seem untenable. Furthermore, on the basis of non-traditional communication models, exhibits have been considered ‘communicative mediums’ that, instead of just passing information, participate in its translation (Cf. McManus 1994: 42). Moreover, by considering displays as ‘signifying

systems' (e.g. Lidchi 1997: 168; Kräuter 1995: 64), a body of literature has explored the dynamics of meaning-making that operate in displays. In addition, many studies have conceptualised exhibits as 'settings and mediums for representation' (Hooper-Greenhill 1991: 49; Karp 1991a: 12; Pearce 1992: 141), 'systems of representation' (Ferguson 1996: 178) or 'representational systems' that shape knowledge (Moser 2006: 2- 3).

Not surprisingly, semiotics –a discipline that proposes a general theory of culture, analysing communication, signification, and representation phenomena– (Eco 2005a: 51) has become an important source of theorising about exhibitions. Indeed, as the above-mentioned array of conceptions show, displays have been largely seen, and thus analysed as 'semantic entities': a cultural phenomenon that works through a communicative medium in which processes of signification/representation take place.

In spite of these common assumptions, scholars of diverse disciplines such as history, museum studies, art history, natural sciences, cultural studies, anthropology and archaeology have articulated different theoretical routes. Three major theoretical approaches can be clearly detected. The first builds on the notion of 'communication', the second derives from the idea of 'signification', while the third relates to the concept of 'representation'.

Each of these models has offered different ways to understand both displays and their inner dynamics. The 'communication' approach has addressed issues related to the transmission of information through exhibitions. In comparison, studies about display 'signification' have analysed how the contents of these spectacles acquire meaning. On the basis of the concept of 'representation', academic initiatives have focused on examining the process of knowledge production that takes place in displays.

However, due to the fact that these models have been usually employed separately, no critique has been developed to address both their advantages and disadvantages on a comparative basis. Furthermore, none have noticed that they can actually offer a complementary explanation of how displays work, since they tackle different scales of the same phenomena. In addition, since these approaches have not incorporated new developments in Semantic Semiotics, scholarly enquiry has failed to generate a theoretical platform that, by integrating all the scales of analysis, can explain how displays convey ideas.

This chapter aims to advance the theoretical understanding about exhibits, by proposing a new theoretical approach: Structural Semantics. This model is derived from updating approaches to 'communication', 'signification' and 'representation' previously employed in academic literature for analysing displays. It also integrates their perspectives by proposing that the transmission of information, the production of meaning, and the creation of knowledge constitute different levels of a single phenomenological process that takes place in a display, which actually

constitute its prime and intrinsic purpose: this is –according to Kaplan (1995: 37)– ‘to convey ideas’.

In spite of the fact that it has long been recognised that displays convey ideas, the wider issue of how this process operates remains under-investigated. Indeed, we still know little about the *manner* in which an exhibit gives ‘ideas a tangible form in a three-dimensional space’ (Kaplan 1995: 37). Additionally, it is yet not clear how these ideas are conveyed to the audience. Effectively, one of the greatest challenges of contemporary research is to explain how exhibits create a connection between producers and visitors, thus making complex notions comprehensible. However, we also still need to delineate a method that enables us to understand ‘the dynamics by which displays are set out to convey intelligible messages’ (Cf. Pearce 1987: 182), by offering basic structural and decipherable ideas.

Semantic Semiotics attempts to explain how ideas are produced and received through a ‘structuring system’. The ‘structuring system’ is understood as an *entanglement* that enables the loading/unloading of ideas in an exhibit (*my italics*). This process operates on the basis of a structural and decipherable set of codes, which are articulated by the producer, made tangible by the exhibit through the articulation of its components in a three-dimensional format, and recognised by the viewer. This model serves to fulfil a twofold goal: to analyse how exhibits work and to provide analytical tools for examining their role in the articulation of complex notions, such as that of ‘ancient civilisation’, at the core of this thesis.

## **2.1. COMMUNICATION: COMPOSITION AND FUNCTION OF DISPLAYS**

Displays are made of a wide range of elements, including the location of the exhibition, its architectural and design features, objects, texts (panels, labels), graphics (photographs, maps, charts, drawings), lighting, furniture, and, on occasion, printed material (information sheets, guidebooks, catalogues) (Kaplan 1995: 40). This heterogeneity of materials makes it difficult to analyse exhibits from a formalistic point of view. For that reason, the structure of displays is usually formulated in functional terms.

According to this view, Belcher (1991:40) and Dean (1994:3) have proposed that exhibits integrate two main components.

- The selected group of ‘things’ and/or ‘objects’ (including, photographs, paintings, and other type of artefacts), or ‘live elements’ (plants, animals and people) that constitute the core of the display.
- The network of space, architectural elements, furniture, arrangements and technologies that help to create a cohesive unit, enclosing the exhibition’s shape and modelling its form, organisation and narrative.

This division is certainly problematic since some elements can be the focus of display and, at the same time, function as aids for the presentation of other artefacts. Nevertheless, the conceptualisation of exhibitions on the basis of this binary categorisation is useful to address two scales of analysis: the ‘content’ of the display and its ‘context’. Studies of ‘signification’ have traditionally tackled the scale of the ‘object’ in exhibits, while its ‘contextual’ dimension has become the main subject of research on ‘representation’.

Yet, exhibits are not only composed of a ‘content’ and ‘context’. Long ago, Gardner & Hellar (1960 in Belcher 1991: 40) stated that ‘an exhibition does not in fact exist until it is crowded with people’. However, it was not until quite recently that some scholars (e.g. Saumarez-Smith 1989:19; Baxandall 1991: 37) began to recognise that the ‘visitor’ is the third component of a display. Thanks to this awareness, ‘Visitor Studies’ (e.g. Merriman 1992; Macdonald 2007) today constitute a major area of sociological, ethnological, and documentary research concerning issues relating ‘consumers’ and viewers ‘perception’.

The mirror-side of reception/consumption is that of the emission/producer. Nevertheless, display theorising does not always recognise that the ‘producer’ is an additional component of the display. This is perhaps due to the fact that the figure of the producer is often absent –or at least not present in the way that the visitor is– in the display once this is already operating. However, the producer’s input is fundamental: her/his decisions determine the composition of the exhibit. Furthermore, as stated elsewhere (Medina González 1999: 3), ‘the epistemological status of a display depends largely on the ways in which the curator perceives and represents [its] contents’.

The neglect of the role of the ‘producer’ in recent theorising about displays reflects various problems. On the one hand, in comparison to the already consolidated field of ‘Visitor Studies’, until now, there is not a theoretical or analytical framework that analyses the realm of ‘production’ of displays. On the other hand, the work of the ‘producer’ is not only rarely documented, but also often perceived as a simple mechanical task that requires no examination.

As a result, there is dual academic limitation:

- The dynamics that are involved in the production and emission of information in displays remain under-investigated.
- The process that takes place between the producer and the visitor is not fully understood.

As a consequence, we know very little about the manner in which displays actually convey information and how this becomes intelligible to the visitor.

Issues about emission, transmission and reception of information have been often tackled from the point of view of communication theory, an approach often employed for research on

exhibitions (e.g. McManus 1994, Kaplan 1995; Hooper-Greenhill 1991). Communication theory has proposed a basic model for displays (Figure 3).

Figure 3. Basic Communication Model  
(Adapted from Hooper-Greenhill 1991 :

This model certainly clarifies some issues about the display function and its working dynamics: it situates the exhibit's composite elements, showing that the receiver (i. e. the visitor), the display and, the sender (the curator) are part of a communication system. However, several criticisms have been made of this way of conceptualising an exhibit: firstly, this model proposes a linear view of communication; secondly, it suggests that the communicative act begins with the sender; thirdly, the communication system implies that the intention of the communication defines the meaning of a communicative event, and fourthly, the communication structure assumes that the receiver is cognitive passive (Cf. Hooper-Greenhill 1991: 57-58). In addition, McManus (1994: 42) has suggested that this model implies that the message possesses an 'independent existence', an assumption that not only simplifies the communication process, but also denies linguistic and psychological understanding of it. As a response, Hooper-Greenhill (1991: 57-58) has proposed an interactive model for museum displays (Figure 4):

Figure 4. Interactive Model for Museum Displays  
(From Hooper-Greenhill 1991: 59)

This model is more appropriate than its predecessor as it shows the complexity of the dynamics of communication that operate in displays within several scales:

- The visitor is not only a 'receiver', whose part in the communication process is to take the message bundle, but an active maker of meanings: an interpreter.
- Reading an exhibition is as important as creating it (Hooper-Greenhill 1991: 58).
- The display constitutes a medium that performs both the connection and transmission of messages through a communicative act.

In effect, as Hooper-Greenhill (1991: 59) states, this model implies that ‘for the success of any communicative act [including a display], both the expression and the interpretation need to be in a dynamic relationship’.

To sum up, communication theory has significantly contributed to the conceptualisation of a ‘display’, as well as to understanding its structure and the function of its components. New approaches have developed an interactive model in which displays are understood as ‘performative’ entities of communication, which are responsible for the transmission of information, messages and meanings. However, like any theoretical standpoint, this model has its own limitations. The most important is that it cannot fully explain the manner in which exhibits transmit meanings, because it does not explain how these meanings are produced in the first place. In fact, the issue of meaning production has been tackled by a different approach here named ‘Signification’, the topic of the following section.

## **2.2. SIGNIFICATION: MEANING MAKING IN DISPLAYS**

The process of signification has been a central topic of enquiry of both material culture studies and semiotics, disciplines that, focusing on the scale of the ‘object’ –the basic entity of the display content–, have provided a fresh perspective on the dynamics of meaning-making that take place in exhibits.

Research in material culture has shown that objects experience shifts of meaning through history (e.g. Pearce 1994a: 125-140), thus concluding that ‘signification’ is neither absolute nor an objective fact, but subject to relativism (i.e. Hodder 1989: 3-5; Pearce 1994b: 4). Under the influence of Semiotics, objects have been conceptualised as ‘signs’: entities ascribed with meanings. However, the manner in which the ‘object-sign’ conveys meaning is still debatable.

Saussurean semiology, a theory of signs that has influenced a large number of museum studies (e.g. Hodge and D’Souza 1979, Duncan & Wallach 1978, Lidchi 1997), proposes that the meaning of the ‘sign’ depends on the relation between its two components: the ‘signifier’ and the ‘signified’ (Chandler 2002: 19). Like many scholars influenced by the semiology, Hodder (1987: 1) argues that the relation between ‘signifier’ and ‘signified’ is an arbitrary one and, thus, it is its meaning. This argument endorses Lidchi’s (1997: 162) idea that the ‘fixity of an object’s physical presence cannot deliver guarantees at the level of meaning’ in a display. Following these views, ‘object-signs’ placed in exhibits have been conceived of as polysemic and potentially inexhaustible in meanings. This assertion is, however, problematic, for it implies that ascription of meaning is absolutely erratic, an idea that somehow denies the possibility that material culture can transmit information from the display producer to its viewer.

Peircean semiotics, an alternative theory of signs that has been rarely incorporated into research about exhibits, puts forward another way of looking at the signification process of 'object-signs'. It states that meaning-making 'involves the cooperation of three entities': the 'signified' (or 'representant'), the 'signifier' (or 'represented') and the generic 'interpretant'. The relationship between 'signifier' and 'signified' depends on their 'potential' to refer to a generic 'interpretant', which originates in the inventory of the interpretative *habitus* of the community (Eco 2005a: 24).

Peircean semiotics offers useful ideas for understanding the process of signification that takes place at the level of the 'object-sign', particularly in displays, for the following reasons:

- It contests the idea of the 'arbitrariness' of the sign, by establishing that signification operates within a pool of potential, but restricted meanings
- By accepting that the 'signifier' performs a particular association with the 'signified', this model proposes that the 'object-sign' is not only a container of meaning, but also an active participant of the signification process.
- It acknowledges that the signification process involves the participation of the 'interpreter' responsible for the activation of the 'generic interpretant'. For that reason, the Peircean 'object-sign' is often understood as a 'code' that designates meaning but that requires decoding to actually signify (Cf. Hernandez 1998: 18).
- It implies that signification depends on a set of interpretative codes known by the interpreter.

Regardless of their lack of theoretical awareness of Peircean semiotics, some recent studies of meaning-making at the scale of the 'object' agree with the above views. For instance, Shelton (2000: 185) proposes that 'things' are *performative* tools encouraging different levels of signification' (*my italics*). In addition, Moser (2006: 226) has recently demonstrated that material culture possesses 'such a unique ability to assert its own meanings that some struggle to articulate within the limited theoretical resources available to them' within exhibitions. A complementary contention derives from post-processual archaeology, which argues that material culture is not passive since it can resist interpretation (Egderworth 2003: 12). Furthermore, stating that this 'resistance arises from the entanglement' between object and subject, Egderworth (2006: 2) stresses the active role of the interpreter. Bohrer (1998: 198) endorses this interactive perspective, by putting forward the idea that meaning arises between the viewer and the thing that is viewed in a display.

Interactive models about meaning-making have also developed from theory-laden perspectives derived from semiotic theory. One of these approaches is that of Morris (1994: 27 in Hernandez 1998: 19) who, equating the 'object' to a 'signal' that produces a reaction in the receiver, proposed a triadic prototype of the 'signal'. This recognises the participation of both the



producer (who establishes the 'referent') and the interpreter (who interprets it), is compatible with the interactive communication model for displays presented in Section 2.2.

Another interactive model of signification derives from museum studies that –opposing traditional perspectives implying that museum visitors were passive, uncritical and incapable of making their own meanings– have recently accepted that the viewer influences the interpretation of objects in displays (Pearce 1987: 187; Kaplan 1995: 37; Hooper-Greenhill 1992: 6). Under the influence of semiotics of communication, Hooper-Greenhill (1991: 54) followed this trend of thought to explain that exhibitions are saturated with 'indices' that are not necessarily signifying by themselves, but rather significative since 'they may come to mean something to the observer through a process of interpretation'. Thus, this prototype is similar to that of Morris, although it takes the side of the viewer. From this standpoint, Hooper-Greenhill (1991: 54) makes a further contribution, proposing that 'indices' may be meaningful only 'if relevant and selected by the observer', an argument that actually gives theoretical grounding to the widely accepted view that there is no essential viewer or homogenous public for an exhibition (Cf. Krauter 1992: 62). In fact, the perspective of the Semiotics of Communication is that a heterogeneous group of visitors can define diverse possibilities of interpretation for a given object-signal in a display.

Nevertheless, there are three major problems related to both of these approaches:

- Since they are derived from the general framework of semiotics, both models put forward the notion that 'all meaning, whatever the kind, is a matter [...] of social construction' (Pearce 1994b: 4), a view that suggests that signification largely depends on the capability of a social group to agree and share a set of conventional meanings: a signification *habitus*. However, no further explanation is given regarding the origin or actual workings of the 'signification *habitus*' in the communication process.
- They provide no explanation of why some visitors actually ascribe similar interpretations to a given subject, whose meaning was the same of that established by the 'producer' of the display.
- They tend to separate the study of two processes, which are intrinsic parts of the same phenomena: production and consumption.

Approaches derived from the semiology of communication (Cf. Leeds-Hurwitz 1993; Blanco y Bezdeza 2007; Ferran 2007) appear to overcome the above deficiencies, by offering a complementary way of examining the interaction between communication and signification.

The semiology of communication contends that 'any act of communication can be described as a process in which an emissary produces a sign, which is then interpreted by a receptor' (Ferran 2007: 1). Following this principle, the process of communication comprises two phases: that of

production and that of interpretation, whose inner relations can be represented in the following diagram (Figure 5).

Figure 5. Process of Communication (From Ferran 2007: 4)

Academic research has not explicitly incorporated the views of the semiology of communication for theoretically informed analysis of displays until now. However, MacManus (1991: 42) seems to agree with its main premises by proposing the following communication model for displays, which seem to integrate the phases of production/interpretation into a single configuration (Figure 6).

Figure 6. Communication Model of Displays  
(From McManus 1991: 42)

This model innovates by incorporating the notion of ‘transaction’, which strongly underlines the mediating function of the exhibit as a bearer of knowledge and information. Accordingly, McManus (1991: 42) ascribes a key function to the contents of the displays: they ‘contain propositional information necessary for the building and sharing of information between the visitors and the Museum staff’. Hence, this model establishes that the exhibitions communicate because they ‘transact’ meanings already known by producers and viewers. This standpoint is also clear in the conceptualization of the ‘message’, which is considered as being forged as ‘a transaction between the minds [of the author and the audience] at the moment of communication’ (McManus 1991: 42).

Yet, this model does have two important restrictions, which are derived from the inner rationale and focus of the signification approach. To begin with, the notion of ‘transaction’ implies the concept of shared knowledge between producers and viewers. However, the general role that is played by knowledge in displays, and in particular, the phenomenological issues related to the shaping and articulation of scientific knowledge at exhibits, are not central for this, or any model, derived from semiotics. Nor does signification theory address how certain meanings persist through time, an issue related to the process of the creation of knowledge by experience.

Examining the role of knowledge and experience in displays requires alternative analysis on the ‘framework’ of the exhibit, an issue that constitutes the central subject of the ‘representation’ approach.

### 2.3. CONTEXT AND KNOWLEDGE: THE REPRESENTATION APPROACH

‘Things mean differently in different contextual settings’ (Hooper-Greenhill 2000: 15). Research on museum displays has recently supported this view, by showing that ‘new stories are told when objects become associated with others and when they are placed in a framework designed for viewing’ (Moser 2006: 3). Furthermore, some authors have argued that displays mobilise objects, arrangements, technologies and interpretative materials to convey messages (e.g. Dubé 1995: 4; Lidchi 1997: 174; Shanks & Tilley 1987: 68; Saumarez-Smith 1989: 18). Kräuter (1995: 64) supports this view by stating that ‘material elements of an exhibition and its respective framings (building, location, style of announcements) define the ways in which an exhibition becomes meaningful’. Based on these views, displays have been described as ‘cultural contexts’ in which objects acquire signification (MacDonald 1996: 8; Pearce 1992: 141). Following this trend of thought, Lidchi (1997: 168) has convincingly argued that exhibits ‘provide us with the best forum for an examination of the creation of meaning’, an assertion substantiated through various arguments.

To begin with, exhibitions are the result of ‘selecting and structuring processes’ (Pearce 1990: 169). Indeed, from the point of view of its production, an exhibit entails decision-making regarding the location, position, arrangement and mode of presentation of its contents, as well as about the type of exhibit, its structure and its design. According to Karp & Lavine (1991b: 1), such ‘decisions are made to emphasise certain elements and downplay others, to assert some truths and ignore others’. Consequently, it has been argued that ‘what is actually displayed may not be as important [...] as the overall environment within which displays are presented’ (Lumley 1994: 67).

In concordance with the latter view, but from the perspective of the consumption of displays, some investigations have also demonstrated that the exhibit’s architectural setting, morphology, design, and style direct the viewer’s gaze, affecting his/her perception of objects and, thus, his/her interpretation (Royal Ontario Museum 1976; Saumarez-Smith 1989; Baxandall 1991; Vogel 1991; Karp & Wilson 1996).

Yet, conceptualising displays as ‘signifying contexts’, i.e. *locations* where signification takes place (Lidchi 1997: 115, *my italics*), is problematic. It assumes that the exhibit is a passive entity, which enables the production of meaning, but does not take part in the signification processes described above (Cf. Ferguson 1996: 178). For this reason, recent theorising about exhibitions has alternatively conceived exhibitions as active semantic entities, i.e. ‘signifying systems’ (Moser

2006: 3). However, and in spite of a massive and growing body of literature about museums, we still know very little about the manner in which displays signifying systems work and how 'their distinctive ways of participating in the process of meaning making' operate (Smiles & Moser 2005: 6).

Stránsky (1991: 30) argues that everything on display exerts sign *functions* (*my italics*). Unfortunately, academic enquiry provides no clear explanation of how specific display mechanics actually work for presenting, enhancing, excluding or modifying the signification of an 'object' that may have already an established meaning within a different signification system. These questions are of considerable importance due to their relation to a key phenomenological process examined before: objects can 'resist' interpretation, including, of course, that imposed by displays. For these reasons, some scholars (e.g. Jenkins 1994:244) have pointed out the need to analyse how displays 'stabilise certain meanings of the objects by putting into action mechanics of persuasion'. Such an enquiry has been tackled by taking into account the notion of 'representation', understood as a 'key process in which both meaning and culture are produced' (Hall 1997b: 1-5).

As Asma (2001: xii) has argued, both the public and the professionals are yet to fully understand the philosophy behind exhibitions, because people often fail to notice the 'representational frame' of the display. Thus, representational issues have become central in recent scholarship devoted to the theoretical and analytical examination of exhibitions (see Pearce 1990, 1992, 1994; Bohrer 1998; Lidchi 1997; MacDonald 1998b; Hooper-Greenhill 2000; Moser 2001, 2006). This trend is grounded in two motives.

First, contemporary thinking about 'representation' takes a step forward in semiotic analysis by stressing both the dynamics of signification and its product. It thus incorporates the conceptualisation of displays as 'representations'; that is interpretations in their own right (Lidchi 1997: 165-166). Additionally, the representational approach pursues a more holistic overview than the signification one: it attempts to examine the wide range of processes through which the exhibits 'symbolise, stand for, represent and/or signify', (Hall 1997c: 25-26). Hence, due to the influence of cultural studies, representation theory is not limited to analysing how signification is produced, for it maintains that meaning is actually produced and exchanged through *language* (Hall 1997c: 1-5, *my emphasis*).

Second, language is generally understood as an 'assemblage of signs constructed and interpreted with reference to the conventions associated with a genre and a particular medium of communication' (Chandler 2002: 3). As Pearce (1994b: 15) states, whereas language usually is conceived as a fundamental structure of communication, the term 'speech' (or *parole*) refers to the concrete action of communicating. This categorisation is useful to understand the dual nature of exhibits as representation phenomena: indeed, the notion of the speech is helpful to

examine displays as representations, while that of language is useful in analysing the representational system that operates through the process of exhibiting. Concomitantly, a large number of contributions on display representation examine how linguistic mechanisms operate within interpretations, while trying to determine the nature of their conventions (Pearce 1990, 1992, 1994; Stränsky 1991; Bohrer 1998; Coxall 1991; Kräuter 1995; Lidchi 1997; MacDonald 1998b; Hooper-Greenhill 2000; Moser 2001, 2006). This research has evolved into three main trends: the textual, the visual and the textual/visual. Although this conventional division reflects the fact that displays often incorporate and combine both written and visual media, its rationale actually derives from an analytical development within the academic programme: scholars have recognised that displays have much in common with two distinctive kinds of language, namely the verbal/written and the non-verbal/visual.

Examining the theoretical basis of textual, visual and textual/visual approaches requires not only acknowledging their different characteristics –focal points, premises and, methods of approximation–, but also their respective contributions and limitations for the investigation of displays. This evaluation can be improved by taking into consideration the influence of each of the trends in both archaeology and museum studies, for it is precisely in the analysis of representations about the past, including exhibits in which major developments have taken place.

### **2.3.1. The Textual Approach**

Following the influence of semiotics, poststructuralism and, literary theory, early postprocessual archaeology posed the analogy of '*archaeology as text*' (e.g. Hodder 1986, 1987, 1989; Tilley 1989; 1999). In fact, some scholars have argued that archaeologists *write* (rather than read) the past, an assertion that opens enquiry into the ways in which archaeological discourses are produced (Shanks & Tilley 1987, *my emphasis*). Research on this subject has been addressed via discussion of 'archaeological poetics': a programme concerned with the form, style and design employed by archaeologists to produce and communicate knowledge of the past (Shanks 1992). In addition, by examining the content and implications of different types of literature, various scholars (e.g. Evans 1983; Girdwood 1984; Burt 1987; Scarre 1990; Gero & Root 1990; Landau 1991; Kohl & Fawcett 1995, Diaz-Andreu 2007) have developed critiques on the political role that archaeological interpretations have played throughout history.

Several researchers have promoted the analogy of exhibits as *texts* (e.g. Hodge and D'Souza 1979; Pearce 1992: 141; MacDonald 1996: 5, *my italics*). On the basis of this equivalence, Coxall (1991) and Stränsky (1991) employed literary theory to analyse the narrative of displays, raising questions about 'authorship' and 'readers'. Yet, the most important contributions to the textual approach have been studying the formative procedures of meaning making of displays, analysing

their narrative/aesthetic patterns, as well as exposing their rationales and assumptions (Bann 1984: 77-42; Lidchi 1997: 158-184).

Works on these topics have provided insights into the manner in which distinctive mechanics of representation work. For example, Hodge and D'Souza (1979: 354) have shown that the context of the exhibit, its setting and lighting are as significant as the location of the information, the context of texts and the size of the lettering. Jordanova (1989: 23), Sherman & Rogoff (1994: xi), and Kräuter (1995:64) have additionally demonstrated that exhibits ascribe meanings to objects through processes of selection, categorisation, classification, arrangement, framing and positioning. Moreover, it has been argued that particular locations and arrangements have an effect on the interpretation of the overall display. For instance, Kaplan (1995: 4) has stated 'that viewers are more likely to accept messages in the context of museums'. Meanwhile, Coxall (1991: 85) has argued that an exhibit with few objects in a large space assumes greater significance than a display with a larger number of objects packed into a smaller area. Other scholars have investigated the role of particular interpretative aids. For instance, Lidchi (1997: 156) has argued that written and visual aids help to construct the narrative of display.

A major contribution of the 'poetics of display' derives from the influence of Barthesian semiotics, a project that questions the effect of objectivity to analyse the issue of persuasion. Barthes' (1993: 15) initial thesis was that representations are usually 'innocented' or 'naturalised' throughout the articulation of persuasion strategies, which 'purify' their content from the constructed and motivated values that are inherent to any cultural construction. By this process, representations thus convince us of their unquestionable validity. Following this view, Jordanova (1989: 24) and Sherman & Rogoff (1994: xi) have stated that displays often seek to present their interpretations as somehow inherent in the objects, in order to create the effect that its representation is transparent, neutral and unmediated. Lidchi (1997: 155-188) has actually identified two written strategies that displays deploy to 'naturalise' their narratives: the use of a non-personal voice and the presentation of interpretations as 'facts'.

Today, it is largely accepted that exhibitions 'involve the cultural, social and political business of negotiation and value-judgement' (Macdonald 1998b: 1). Accordingly, research on the poetics of display is often accompanied by analysis of the social circumstances in which exhibitions are organised, presented and understood. This is often done in order to uncover 'the ideology and the cultural assumptions that influence the interpretation of the objects and that determine display formats' (Cf. Cannizzo 1991: 150-160), a programme usually named the 'politics of display'.

Studies of the politics of display have focused on different types of exhibits, including scientific (Arnold 1998, Gieryn 1998), historical (West 1990; Kavanagh 1996); ethnographical (Hodge and D' Souza 1979; Karp & Lavine 1991a; Lidchi 1997; Dias 1998; Lang 1998; Butler 2007; Bolton

2007; Dias 2008; Jackins 2008; Conklin 2008) and archaeological (Leone 1984; Shanks & Tilley 1987: 65-99; Pearce 1990: 168-170; Butler 1996; Medina González 1998, 1999, 2003). In spite of the variability of display themes, all the studies have made four common conclusions.

- Exhibitions are partial and subjective since they are based on the state of knowledge and the resources of their originators.
- Exhibits and their interpretations are influenced by the contemporary concerns of their producers: hence they often reflect their ideology, bias and interest.
- The narratives of the displays tend, either intentionally or unintentionally, to disseminate messages that support or legitimise dominant cultural, social or political views.
- The language adopted in the museum or the display conveys socially constructed views, assumptions and bias.

The textual approach has thus provided two major contributions to the understanding of displays. On the one hand, linguistic theory has provided methodological foundations for the reading of exhibitions (e.g. Stransky 1991; Lidchi 1997). On the other, by developing a critique of ideological and political content, this approach has problematised the role of displays in society.

However, the textual approach is not exempt from weaknesses or limitations:

- As Macdonald (1996: 5) has noted, ‘the analyst’s “reading” is not [always] acknowledged as a particular and positioned act of interpretation, but is presented as consonant with the motives of the exhibitors and the messages picked up by visitors’.
- Many studies have focused on examining the narrative of particular displays, instead of exploring how this narrative is produced. Speaking in semiotic terms, it can be argued that the textual approach has tended to concentrate on the study of the ‘speech’ of exhibits, rather than on the analysis of the ‘language’ employed for displaying. This is particularly true for ethnographic and archaeological exhibits: indeed as Merriman (1999b: 5) has rightly pointed out, ‘very little work of a critical and analytical nature has been undertaken on the mechanisms and technologies of displays, beyond the formal evaluation of the effectiveness of (primarily) science exhibits’.
- Due to the influence of Barthesian semiotics, the textual approach has tended to centre attention on the politics, instead of on the poetics of display. Hooper-Greenhill (1989: 52, original emphasis) has criticised this proclivity, by stating that traditional semiotic research is inclined to analyse the *unintended* messages rather than the *intended* effects of the signifying systems. As a consequence of this, curators have not scrutinised how

display technologies work, and thus ‘we still know very little about the manner in which displays contribute to the process of creating knowledge’ (Moser 2002: 5).

- Museum studies tend to emphasise the study of the written media (panels, labels, and also catalogues) presented in displays (Merriman 1999b: 5), an inclination underscores the textual approach, since it employs a language system that is more apt for analysing written than visual media. This tendency may be the reason why relatively little attention has been given to the manner in which visual technologies work in displays.
- A further problem of the textual model originates in its main rationale: the analogy between display and text. However, exhibits are unique genres of representation due to ‘the ways in which they objectify particular orders of knowledge and experience and the prominence given to material culture’ (MacDonald 1996: 5). They also constitute a controlled environment that facilitates the encounter of the viewer with the element on display in its three-dimensional qualities (Belcher 1991: 38). Furthermore, as explained before, exhibits employ a wide range of non-verbal media, such as objects, drawings, photographs, architectural and design settings etc., which do not necessarily speak through the same conventions as written language. Nor can viewing be equated with reading because the former does not operate by rules of order, linearity and grammar as the latter does.

For these reasons, as Macdonald (1996: 5) has pointed out, ‘we need to move towards a further elaboration of the ways in which museum [displays and other types of exhibitions] are *unlike* texts’ (original emphasis). This can be achieved by highlighting the fact that a display ‘enables the visitor to experience an all-round viewing, not only of the elements displayed, but also of the exhibition as a whole’ (Macdonald 1996: 5). Even though exhibits appeal to perception through a range of human senses (Kaplan 1995: 37), viewing has been considered the principal mode by which visitors perceive the exhibit’s contents, their structure and the messages conveyed (Hooper-Greenhill 2000: 14).

Aspects related to visualisation and visual media have become central issues for an emerging field of enquiry that is generally termed ‘visual culture’. Accepting that displays employ a wide range of visual media and their appreciation involves acts of viewing, the visual approach has started to influence research theorising about exhibitions, as the following section shows.

### **2.3.2 The Visual Approach**

The emerging field of Visual Culture raises theoretical questions about the practices and products of visualising (Mirzoeff 1998b: 6-7). It contends that Western modernity has been dominated ‘by the sense of sight in a way that set it apart from its pre-modern predecessors’ (Jay



1998: 66). A number of scientific and philosophical discourses have described the gaze 'as an apparatus of investigation, verification, surveillance and cognition' (Rogoff 1998: 66). However, theorists of visual culture have noticed an interesting paradox: whereas western modernity emphasises the importance of visualising, much of its culture is characterised by *iconophobia* – a general prejudice against visual manifestations – a phenomenon that is not uncommon among members of the scientific community.

The origins, manifestations and consequences of *iconophobia* both in science and archaeology are well documented (Cf. Rupke 1993; Mazzolini 1993b; Bradley 1997; James 1997; Molineaux 1997b; Champion 1997; Rogoff 1998; Shanks 1997; Moser 1998; Smiles & Moser 2005). For the aims of this thesis, suffice is to say that Visual Theory has argued that the general prejudice against visual representations has extended towards displays. Indeed, 'too often academics have made the mistake of thinking that exhibits are somehow irrelevant to the "real business" of investigating' (Moser 2002: 4). Furthermore, exhibits have often been perceived as by-products of academic research (Moser 2006: 4), instead of as a topic of examination in their own right. Additionally, since the history of museums has tended to focus on the emergence of these institutions as vast repositories of collections, scholars have paid little attention to the role that displays have historically played in knowledge making (Moser 2006: 5).

The scholarly analysis of archaeological pictures, illustrations, photographs and displays has slowly developed into a proper research field, which reached its maturity as a proper academic concern in the 1990s (Smiles & Moser 2005: 3). In a couple of decades, the visual approach has effectively contributed to the understanding of visual representations, their characteristics, their functions, and the ways in which they participate in meaning making processes, serve for the formulation of interpretations, and play a part in knowledge production. In particular, the developing field of 'archaeological representation' has aroused awareness of how important visual language is for archaeology and its central role in the interpretation of the past.

As explained in Chapter 1, research on archaeological representation has already focused on the wide range of visual media employed by archaeologists. Although less abundant, a number of studies have also centred on the visual character of displays (e.g. Russell 1997; Beard and Henderson 1999; James 1999; Wood and Cotton 1999; Moser 1997, 1998, 2001, 2002, 2006, Smiles & Moser 2005; Scott 2005).

The formal application of visual theory for the analysis of exhibitions is less than ten years old (Hooper-Greenhill 2000; Moser 2001, 2002, 2006; Smiles & Moser 2005; Scott 2005). However, it has revolutionised the way in which displays are conceptualised, by tackling problems that cannot be properly examined by communication, signification and representational/textual approaches.

It is noteworthy that visual research on exhibitions has been greatly influenced by the study of graphic media. Prime examples of this impact can be found in both archaeology and palaeontology. As result of ten years of work on archaeological representations of Human Prehistory, Moser (1992, 1993a, 1993b, 1998, 2001) has made contributions to the analysis of imagery and later moved forward to the examination of dioramas (Moser 1997, 2002) and museum displays (Moser 2006). However, until now no one has attempted to compare her conclusions on imagery and that on object-based exhibitions. Comparatively, Mitchell (1993) embraced a transversal approximation to both two- and three-dimensional visual media for his chronological study of the representation of dinosaurs in Western modern culture. Although his methodological approach does not explicitly refer to the theoretical rationale of visual culture, this author assumes that graphic media ‘works’ similarly to exhibits and other types of spectacles. Hence, the influential work of both investigators suggests that for a profound and comprehensive understanding of the representational aspects of exhibits, it is key to comprehend the main contributions that visual research has achieved in the study of graphic manifestations.

Visual theorists have stressed the significance of visual media in communication. For instance, it has been argued that images generate ‘an undeniable impact on first sight that the written text cannot replicate’ (Rogoff 1998: 15), because they not only convey information, but also ‘afford pleasure and displeasure, influence style, determine consumption, [and] mediate power relations’ (Mazzolini 1993b: vii-x). Furthermore, Knight (1993: 322-333) and Mirzoeff (1998b: 6) have proposed that images are effective mechanisms for the propounding and articulation of scientific ideas due to the fact that they convey a great amount of information, summarise data, serve to express what cannot be properly described verbally, transmit ideas that can be articulated less elegantly or concisely in words, and/or make theories more accessible. Nevertheless, the way in which visual media participates in display communication is not yet clear.

Some researchers have stressed the attributes of archaeological visual language, by stating that imagery makes use of a range of interpretative aids (i.e. composition, eye-level, action and composition) that are not accessible to written expression (Moser & Gamble 1997: 186; James 1997: 23). In particular, Moser (1998: 76) contends that archaeological representations ‘embody notions that are not explicit elsewhere’ because they appeal to our sense of reasoning through specific devices, such as iconography, autonomy, longevity, authenticity, singularity, dramatism, and persuasiveness. However, the specific attributes that archaeological visual language deploys for communication in displays are yet to be fully researched. We also still need to investigate the manner in which interpretative devices work in specific modes of archaeological representation, including exhibits.

Moser (1999: 11) has provided initial answers in this respect, by proposing that dioramas of human ancestors have distinctive ways of contributing to the shaping of knowledge about Prehistory. These displays provide formal, artistic, compositional elements and interpretations about the nature of human evolution. Furthermore, her recent study about museum displays (Moser 2006: 3) moves from traditional ways of enquiry about meaning production (i.e. the exploration of the presence/absence of objects and exhibition styles) to 'a more comprehensive investigation of the representational system that has been created for the depiction of the subject'. Her conclusion is that exhibits create knowledge 'via a complicated representational process', which includes: the construction of narratives, the arrangement of objects within a space, their location, size and scale; the appearance of its setting, and the use of interpretative aids (Moser 2006: 218). Thus, on the basis of visual theory, this work not only provides further evidence that certain technologies, already distinguished by the representation approach, constitute the main interpretative devices of displays. Moreover, it shows that by the articulation of visual strategies, displays constitute a distinctive genre for representation of the past. However, it is not clear yet whether these arguments are valid for other types of exhibitions, including those which incorporate visual technologies, such as models, illustrations and photographs.

Several scholars have long demonstrated that visual media have historically contributed to the development of field disciplines both at their conceptual and technical levels (e.g. Rudwick 1976; Baigrie 1996; Jones & Galison 1998; Knight 1993; Lynch and Woolgar 1990; Mazzolini 1993b). In fact, a large body of literature has studied the particular set of conventions that specific disciplines have employed to communicate and define their subject, to convey particular concepts and principles, and to shape their distinctive knowledge (e.g. Knight 1993, 1996 on chemistry; Rudwick 1976, 1992; Rupke 1993; Gould 1993 on geology and palaeontology; Cosgrove & Daniels 1989 on geography; Miller 1984; Ashworth 1987 on physics). In archaeology, Piggott's (1965, 1978) seminal works on the history of archaeological images are key to understanding the close relationship between the production of illustrations and the development of antiquarian thinking. Historiography has also influenced works on visual representations of antiquity (Smiles 1994, 2000), introducing awareness regarding the relationship between the production of an image and the state of knowledge of the depicted subject. Furthermore, whereas it has long been accepted that visualising has influenced scientific observation and thinking (Fleck 1979), Bradley (1997) has recently shown that documented formulas for recording archaeology underline competing perspectives (or disagreements) over what is seen and how it is represented, which then in turn can influence what archaeologists may see in the field. Studies of technical issues (Adkins & Adkins 1989) or historical styles of archaeological illustrations (Bradley 1997) have additionally confirmed the close relationship of archaeological practice with its visual products, showing the intellectual complexity behind any

graphic production. However, the manner in which displays have contributed to the development of archaeological theory, thinking and practice through time remained to be fully investigated.

Research on museum studies has begun to 'explore how exhibitions are central to the shaping of knowledge' of a wide range of disciplines (Moser 2006: 3). Mitchell (1998: 78) has shown that historical and contemporary exhibitions actually illustrate the evolution of theoretical notions about dinosaurs, which scientists have developed throughout time. Moser (1999, 2002) and Wood & Cotton (1999) have also demonstrated that dioramas played an active role in the visualisation and understanding of human prehistory, by shaping interpretations, concepts and theories. In particular, Moser (2006: 33) has shown that exhibitions both create knowledge and influence scholarly understandings about the past because they 'establish interpretative frameworks to structure subsequent study'. However, a key question that remains to be answered is whether displays replicate, articulate, formulate or actually innovate interpretations about the past.

Visual theory has also advanced understanding of non-verbal language in the development of scientific knowledge. Initial insight comes from research on graphic reconstructions of Palaeolithic fauna (Rudwick 1992; Rupke 1993; Mitchell 1998), which suggests that these representations reveal the state of knowledge and the level of expertise of their producers, as well as the specifics of contemporary theory. Underlining the significant role that visualising historically has played in scientific inquiry, Mitchell (1998:55) concluded that imagery is a 'key element in the process of scientific thinking and discovery: [...] a constitutive element, a speculative theoretical construction'.

Although many arguments about the past are presented through non-verbal media (Moser & Gamble 1997: 185), archaeologists have just started to realise the significant role that visual representations play in archaeological interpretative processes. Plenty of evidence supports the view that visual language is a unique form of reasoning about the past (Moser & Gamble 1997: 186). Indeed, archaeological representations not only depend on the development of archaeological knowledge (Bohrer 2003), but also demonstrate 'how archaeologists think and express their ideas' (Moser 1992: 131). Furthermore, both Moser (1992: 16-24) and Gamble (1992: 10) have shown that visual representations are theory-laden, take part in the formation of archaeological concepts, and constitute powerful arguments in their own right. So far, one of the most challenging views is that visual language is 'essential to theoretical work' in archaeology (Molyneux 1997b: 2) because it serves to demonstrate theoretical arguments (Knight 1993: 340) and provides 'a material environment (in the form of models, diagrams, and other images) within which intuition can operate' (Molyneux 1997b: 2-3). Moser (1998: 2-6, 16) further revolutionised the conceptualisation of archaeological representation, by advancing the idea that visualisation plays a part in the configuration of archaeological debates because images 'actively

shape interpretations and knowledge about the past'. According to Moser (1998: 171), visual representations not only have a crucial role in the production of theories but also actually 'represent and constitute archaeological theories'.

Research on the phenomenological status of non-textual language in archaeological displays has provided insight on the way by which exhibitions shape knowledge about the past (Cf. Moser 2006: 3). For instance, Mitchell (1998: 78) has shown that historical and contemporary exhibitions illustrate the evolution of theoretical notions throughout time. In addition, Moser (1999, 2002), Wood and Cotton (1999) have demonstrated that dioramas play an active role in visualisation and interpretation of human prehistory. Furthermore, all three have shown that, historically, exhibits have contributed to the understanding of Prehistory by shaping images, interpretations, concepts and theories. Nevertheless, a key question related to the epistemological character of displays remains unanswered: do exhibits contribute to the theoretical development of archaeology? In addition, it is not clear yet whether these three-dimensional representations constitute theoretical arguments themselves.

A further issue at the core of the visual approach is related to the effects of non-verbal language. As explained before, it is widely recognised that, due to their naturalism, images have a strong persuasive potential that makes them powerful instruments in establishing the authority, the objectivity and the truth of scientific arguments (Rupke 1993; Shanks 1997). However, as Moser (1998: 16-18) clearly points out, the persuasiveness of archaeological representations depends on two factors:

- The image's ability of filling the gaps with 'gratuitous' details, which makes theories appear credible in spite of limited or absent evidence;
- The manner in which visual language convinces us of new ideas, by representing new evidence into a set of familiar pictorial elements or traditions.

These arguments certainly complement Barthesian semiotics, by proposing new mechanisms by which visual language naturalises and gives credibility to representations. Furthermore, by making explicit some of the strategies of visualising, we can acquire further insight into the dynamics of visual language.

Visual language dynamics have recently attracted much attention in influential studies on archaeological representations (Molyneux 1997; Moser & Gamble 1997; Moser 1998). Their conclusions are worth exploring further because they have posed two different perspectives regarding the manner by which visual representations communicate their capacity and resilience over time, the nature of visual language, and how it intervenes on processes of knowledge productions.

- The first model, here termed ‘compositional’, focuses on the scale of whole images or compositions. It maintains the view that the inertia of images results from the continuous recycling of visual compositions in various types of media and contexts, a process that facilitates the spread of scientific knowledge through visual representations that retain their popularity (Molyneux 1997b: 6). Paradoxically, the recycling process works against the improvement of archaeological knowledge since some favourite images stay in power despite being outdated or survive longer than their supporting theories, by lingering in other media, including displays (Moser 1998: 18; Moser and Smiles 2003: 6). Therefore, in spite of their ability to migrate from one media to another, visual representation is thought to have played a conservative role for the development of knowledge. This means that the compositional model assumes that visual language is intrinsically stagnated since its dynamics depend on the transmission of ‘fixed’ compositions.
- The second approach, named here ‘iconic’, focuses on the scale of the components of the images. This model has been initially developed by Moser & Gamble (1997: 190) who argue that representational compositions of hominid ancestors employ a common set of ‘icons’ for depicting the past. Moser (1998) has followed this perspective to trace the origins of a formulaic vision of human origins, which is based on an established iconography. According to her view, icons ‘are successful in conveying meaning because they are frequently repeated and also because they function as stereotypes’ (Moser 2002: 270). Furthermore, since iconographic images are instantly recognisable, they are useful for evoking a ‘familiar concept that has already been established in other images’ (Moser 2002: 270). The iconic approach contends that visual language is not only an active system –whose manifestations migrate from one medium to another–, but also that it works equally as a symbol and means of communication (Moser & Smiles 2003: 5).

As a result of her synchronic study of ancestor imagery, Moser (2002: 58) has been able to document how archaeological representations innovate knowledge throughout the adaptation of their iconographic vocabulary to new discoveries, scientific ideas or theories. Her analysis also demonstrates that the process of knowledge production in displays entails a paradox since a basic representational iconography persists over time by incorporating different pictorial traditions and because new themes are assimilated within a familiar set of icons (Moser 2002: 58). Hence, the iconic approach contends that visual language is not stagnated, but it works through a conservative economy of meaning: indeed, by recycling icons and interpretative frameworks, changes are merely cosmetic despite the acquisition of new classes of material evidence, perspectives and theories (Moser 2002: 178).

Iconic perspectives have been successfully adapted to study the visual language of diorama reconstructions of human prehistory (Moser 1999). In this respect, Moser (1999) contends these displays use the same set of icons that are employed in imagery and hence, that their tendency is to remain intellectually conservative. Her conclusion, which suggests that dioramas articulate representations like images, appears to some extent obvious because dioramas not only look like pictures, but they are often translations of two-dimensional representations into mass and volume. In fact, one of the weaknesses of the iconic standpoint is that supposes a straight-forward similarity between two- and three-dimensional representations, which actually obscures potentially distinctive ways by which different media can shape knowledge. Thus, it remains questionable whether or not exhibitions that do not 'look' like images transmit and formulate interpretations through iconography.

Hence, it is clear that there is still a debate on how visual language works. There are not only different scales of analysis and variable perspectives on the dynamics of visualisation, but also conflicting opinions regarding the way that visual language operates in relation to the development of knowledge.

This section has already referred to some deficiencies in the visual approach. However, the key problem with this theoretical model is that it tends to exaggerate the importance that visual technologies played in exhibitions. However, as Moser & Smiles (2005: 4) have pointed out, exhibits combine verbal and visual explanations. For that reason, research must not overemphasise (or downplay) the contribution of each language to the construction of knowledge in displays. Rather, we need to examine how verbal and visual languages interact with each other within the exhibits, a topic that constitutes the central enquiry of the textual/visual approach.

### **2.3.3. The Textual/Visual Approach**

Miller (1987:95 in James 1997: 25) has recognised that displays employ two different strategies for signification. On the one hand, arrangements, labels, catalogues and other written media constitute 'discursive forms' that work as independent units within a structure that follows a sequential order and grammatical rules. On the other hand, 'presentational forms' –images, models and reconstructions– articulate meaning all at once without having a defined sequence. This categorization does not imply that verbal and visual languages function independently. On the contrary, like some other theorists (i.e. Mazzolini 1993b; Rupke 1993; Molineaux 1997), Miller's perspective recognises that visual and textual systems of communication are not only combined in displays, but work together in different ways. For example, visual language usually makes linguistic discourse effective, quicker and more comprehensible (Mirzoeff 1998b: 7;

Rupke 1993: 513). Furthermore, as Rudwick (1976) has pointed out, visual aids serve to supplement verbal descriptions and theories, since they communicate ideas that cannot be adequately expressed in words. Taking into account these views, Hooper-Greenhill (2000: 17) has suggested that theoretical approaches based on visual culture need to be adapted to exhibitions since these employ both verbal and non-verbal forms of communication.

A groundbreaking attempt at this approach was carried out by Moser (2006) who has followed this mixed approach on her research on object-orientated exhibitions about Ancient Egypt at the British Museum. This investigation aimed to distinguish conventions for knowledge production at exhibits, by showing that the distribution of the objects, the way in which they were organised, the discursive narratives, architectural settings, and other visual/textual effects were fundamental strategies for meaning-making and for passing on interpretations. However, no formal examination has undertaken how verbal and visual languages contribute independently, or complementarily, to the articulation of knowledge in exhibits.

A more comprehensive contribution of the visual/textual approach is the work of Mitchell (1993) on the significance of dinosaurs in modern western culture. This work proposes that the dinosaur sign constitutes an 'image-text': i.e. a composite of visual/verbal signs to which we ascribe name, description, mental construction and an array of representations. Mitchell (1993: 103: 110) also proposes a new way of conceiving of verbal/visual language dynamics, which here is termed 'conventional'. He agrees that certain representations migrate from one type of media to another (including scientific illustrations, comics, and displays) because image/text language dynamics are based on the articulation of 'conventions'. Although his study offers no explicit explanation of the origin of the dinosaur's conventions, it suggests that the first images of these creatures were depicted on the basis of a variety of shapes of reminiscent reptiles, lizards, dragons, large mammals, birds, fishes, kangaroos and amphibians (Mitchell 1993: 104). The conventional approach also accepts that conventions suffer adaptations throughout time that are both meaningful and cosmetic.

On these grounds, Mitchell (1993: 103) conceptualises visual-verbal language as proactive: the process of recycling implies that some image-texts persist and evolve over time throughout the adaptation of conventions to theories, historic schema, fashion, etc. So far, one of his most challenging propositions suggests that the whole repertoire of dinosaur image-texts evokes a 'stereotype' that is related to notions of gigantism, ferocity, reptilian features, extinction and resurrection (Mitchell 1993: 13). The double-function of the stereotype suggests how the visual/written language works. On the one hand, 'stereotypes' are incorporated into different types of media, including descriptions, imagery and displays. On the other, conventional 'stereotypes' can be reconfigured into paradigmatic historic 'prototypes'. 'Prototypes' experienced changes derived from their adaptation to shifts of paradigms, theories and historical schema (Mitchell 1993: 55). This meant that the textual/visual language adapts, by coupling with



the conservation of prominent ‘stereotypes’ as much as evolving through the acquisition of meanings derived from specific contextual conditions. This process has guaranteed the persistence of the image-text of the dinosaur in different media through history.

To summarize, the textual/visual approach has provided a more proactive and holistic perspective regarding language dynamics in display representations. However, it also presents four limitations:

- It shows inconsistencies in its scope. On one hand, it focuses on exhibits that lack formal visual media, such as photographs, models, or images.
- It gives no consideration to the fact that written and visual media are fundamentally different, both in kind and in mode of operation (James 1997: 24).
- Although this approach shows that visual and verbal languages share an economy of meanings, it obscures the fact that each medium ‘produces information in unique and often mutually untranslatable ways’ (James 1997: 24-25)
- It stands on a basic dichotomy between visual and textual theorising. However, not all the technologies of display work through visual or written language. Many exhibits involve the participation of guides or interpreters, thus employing verbal communication. Shows of people usually involve performance. Many displays actually mix different communication media –i.e. objects, labels and images– which implies that diverse modes of communication are at work.
- It rarely examines the manner in which the three-dimensional character of the display – its more distinctive feature– is involved in the representation process.
- In spite of its theoretical innovations, this approach does not explicitly establish its foundations or proposed a clear method for researching purposes.

Therefore, it seems that we need to move forward to developing a theoretical model that provides a clear methodology to analyse the manner in which different languages of communication work in an integrated manner to convey ideas throughout a three-dimensional setting. Developing such a model is the aim of the following section.

#### **2.4. TOWARDS AN INTEGRATED THEORY OF DISPLAYS: THE STRUCTURAL MODEL**

The theoretical approaches reviewed above are characterised by their isolation. Indeed, whereas they have provided conceptual foundations for the understanding of exhibitions, they have tackled different realms as independent research fields. Communication theory has focused on the transmission of messages and information, whereas Signification approaches have centred

on issues of meaning making; meanwhile, representation trends concentrate on the process of knowledge production. However, exhibitions involve all these phenomena: they communicate, construct meanings, and generate knowledge. How these processes work together into an integrated fashion is yet not properly understood.

Thus it is necessary to move forward to a new integrated model, capable of incorporating the benefits of previous approaches, while overcoming their shortcomings. Three issues must stand at the core of this new integrated model of display, namely mechanisation, systematization, and structuration.

#### 2.4.1. Mechanisation

Pearce (1987: 182) proposed that exhibits first and foremost ‘set out to convey intelligible messages’. Following this view, Kaplan (1995:38, *my italics*) has proposed that ‘the messages of the exhibition are intended *to connect those producing them and those receiving them*’. A more pragmatic perspective on this argument is that of Moser (2006: 18) who established that the aim of a display is to ‘import a message’. In spite of their different outlooks, all these propositions suggest a set of theoretically informed propositions regarding the mechanics of communication/signification/representation that operate in displays:

- First, the communication process in an exhibition consists of a mechanism that articulates signification/representation between the producer of the display and its interpreter. In fact, it can be argued that the analysis of those interactions is key to understanding how displays work as communication media allowing the loading and unloading of both meaning and knowledge. According to these views and on the basis of new anthropological theorising (Clifford 1997) about culture and museum dynamics, Scott (2005: 45) has recently conceptualised exhibits as contact zones: a form of two-way interaction between producers and consumers. Similarly, Moser (2006: 17) has described displays as ‘places of informed dialogue’.
- Second, taking into consideration the role of display interactions for signification/representational processes, it can be argued that the communicative power of exhibiting lies not only in constructing, but also in translating meaning and knowledge. Accordingly, Pearce (1987: 182) recognised that a successful exhibition has to offer a basic structural and *decipherable* experience’ (my emphasis) Furthermore, according to current research on display communication dynamics ‘meaning and information for an exhibition visitor can only be produced within the complex and necessary interaction of his/her own categories of thinking [...] and the forms offered by the exhibition’ (Imiker-Sebeok 1991 in Krauter 1992: 64). In this sense, it is worth

considering Krauter's (1992: 64) view on the 'competency' of display visitors, which states that the interpreter's understanding of an exhibit largely depends on the producer's ability to communicate meanings encoded into already established 'conventions'.

- Third, the notion of 'competency' contradicts the assumption that the production and the interpretation phases of a display are mirror images of each other, and thus, essentially reversible (e.g. Figure 6). In fact, as Ferran (2007: 4) states, the communication process is intrinsically asymmetrical: producers are the owners of the object-themes that are chosen to communicate their messages, whereas interpreters are obliged to carry out a process of reconstruction of such object-themes, even if they do not find the original message.
- Fourth, the asymmetrical nature of the display communication process emphasises a phenomenological characteristic that has hitherto passed unnoticed: the producer starts a process already known to him/her, while the interpreter must discover exactly what the producer actualised. For this reason, the phase of production is to some extent an interpretation *a priori*. In other words, in the course of the production, ideas are incorporated into a configuration that depends on an *anticipated interpretation*, in which the producer becomes another interpreter (Ferran 2007: 4, *my emphasis*). Thus, the process of anticipated interpretation actually corresponds to the producer participation in the social institution of language: i.e. the collective process of signification/interpretation of a community, which shares a common culture.
- Fifth, the notion of anticipated interpretation implies that communication can only take place if the object-theme spoken by the producer is the same as that the interpreter imagines (Ferran 2007: 4). Therefore, the transfer of meaning from producer to interpreter only occurs with the use of signs that are socially learnt and socially taught, because they actually conform established 'conventions'.

Recent theorising on Semiotics has started to incorporate all the above issues into an integrated model. Particularly, Eco (2005b: 25) contends that 'any process of communication supposes a system of signification as a necessary condition'. However, instead of combining different theoretical approaches, he seeks to integrate their foundations on the basis of syncretism (Eco 1999: 290). The result is a general theory about culture, a substitute for cultural anthropology, which is named Structural Semantics (Eco 2005b: 52).

In comparison with other theoretical approaches, Structural Semantics focuses on signifying systems within social phenomena in constant change and modification. Its subject of study is thus similar to the 'surface of the sea, where in spite of the continued movement of water

molecules and the flux of sea currents, there is a phenomenon that we call the sea, a landscape well ordered' (Eco 2005b: 53).

Accordingly, this approach proposes the following communication model (Figure 7):

Figure 7. Structural Semantics Model for Cultural Acts, including Displays  
(From Eco 2005b: 58)

This model has two important similarities to that shown in Figure 6: on the hand, both transmitter and receiver are considered active contributors to the process of communication; on the other, the medium –in this case the exhibition– is conceived of as 'transacting' the signal. Therefore, it recognises that three entities actively contribute in the communication process: the transmitter (or display producer), the media (the exhibit), and the receiver (the interpreter).

The Structural Semantic Model provides two important innovations. It recognises that the producer and interpreter processes are asymmetrical, identifying their main differences. Accordingly, the source of conformation of the producer signal is located as an act *a priori*, which directly refers to the 'code': an established set of meaning conventions shared within a social group. Comparatively, the source of the consumer signal depends on a message, the interpretation of which ultimately depends on the relation between a destination and the 'code'. Therefore, this model supports a novel idea: contact between communication poles of the displays is determined by complex and differentiated interactions, including direct relationships between representation and meaning during the production, and indirect relationships between messages and signification during the consumer process. Interestingly enough, the double-sided communication mechanics for exchanging information are determined by a *code*. Due to its importance, we need to examine nature and characteristics of the 'code', which constitutes the central issue of systematisation.

#### 2.4.2. Systematisation

As any derivation from the basic Semiotic programme, Structural Semantics advances the idea that any cultural manifestation constitutes a semantic entity (Eco 1999). However, a distinctive contribution of the latter theory is that any 'semantic entity exposes signifying symptoms, which

constitute communication units' (Eco 2005a: 15). Therefore, Structural Semantics not only combines advanced views on communication and signification, but it actually proposes a syncretism: communication units 'are organised into structural systems that follow the same rules that semiotics establishes for simple signs' (Eco 2005b: 51).

The organisation of such structural systems of communication is related both to the act of 'speech' and the existence of a 'language' ruled by a given grammar, all of them general assumptions of any theory of signification. However, Structural Semantics further proposes that 'code' is not only a fundamental mediating element of the language, but actually 'the elemental structure' of any process of communication that lies underneath the surface of signals and their meanings. Therefore, understanding the nature and function of the 'code' is fundamental to value the strengths of Structural Semantics for the analysis of displays.

Structural Semantics further clarifies the manner in which the communication process connects with cultural conventions, by arguing that the 'code' constitutes a signifying/representational system that establishes a correspondence between the object and what it signifies/represents on the basis of present and absent entities (Eco 2005b: 16). Since the relationship between the object and the 'code' must remain valid for any given destination or receptor (Eco 2005b: 15), the entities comprising the 'code' possess two qualities.

- They remain intact regardless of the medium for their transmission; thus, their format is independent of the transmitter communication media.
- They function through a dialogical equilibrium between inertia and adaptability, for they must be able to persist throughout a reproductive process that allows the incorporation of new 'signifiers' without affecting the stability of the whole system.

The formal and the functional qualities of 'code' entities certainly imply enquiry about the nature of language and its components. However, the representational approach, whose theoretical programme has traditionally tackled the topic of language, does not provide adequate answers in this respect. Instead of analysing language as a structural medium, this is perceived as a discursive act, a tendency that prevails in two scales. On the one hand, communicative entities are analysed without a referent, which means that it is impossible to determine whether their findings belong to the immediacy of an act of speech (*parole*), to language system, or its structural 'code'. On the other hand, as explained before, theoretical thinking has been determined by the textual-visual dichotomy, without considering that in spite of their particularities, both types of language do not exist in isolation. Hence, in order to advance understanding of display mechanics as a phenomenon within the realm of culture, it is necessary to revisit theoretical conceptualising on the characteristics of language dynamics. Such a pursuit implies not only that 'the mechanisms by which the blurring of boundaries occurs

(representation=knowledge) need to be unravelled' (Moser 2002: 280), but that we need to analyse the groundings of representational theory to pose an innovative way of looking at language in the wider context of anthropology.

Structural Semantics contributes an innovative way at looking at language dynamics, by contending that 'ideas are signs' (Eco 2005a: 47). Hence, 'ideas' are conceived of as semantic units that participate in the communication, signification and representational process. Interestingly enough, this view is long accepted by research on museum studies, which has convincingly demonstrated that objects, visual media, written aids, settings and other components of the display serve to 'give ideas a tangible form in a three dimensional space' (Kaplan 1995: 38).

Theorising about archaeological representation has also shown that 'ideas' participate in the articulation of language in exhibiting practices. In fact, some investigations have already demonstrated that certain displays articulate object-themes on the basis of certain composite elements that take the abstract form of an 'idea'. For example, Beard & Henderson (1999) have concluded that topics/ideas of 'city', 'city-wall', 'ruin', 'Empire', 'writing' and, 'periodisation' are essential for the representation of Roman Britain in the displays of the Museum of London. Furthermore, it appears that display representation has worked on the basis of the articulation of composite ideas for a considerable period of time: according to Moser's work (2006: 200-213), 1800s British Museum displays conventionally represented Ancient Egypt through a series of repetitive topics/ideas, including 'monuments', 'hieroglyphs', 'sacred vessels', 'colossal sculptures', 'grotesqueness', 'mummies'. A survey (Motawi 1998) designed to examine the visitors' perceptions of 'Ancient Egypt' on the basis of what they have seen in the present galleries of the British Museum concluded that the image of this culture is generally conceived of on the basis of the following ideas: Art (mummies, sculpture, sarcophagus), Monuments (pyramids, sphinxes, temples), famous characters (Pharaohs, Gods, Cats, The Nile) and Political Features (Dynasties). Taking into account Structural Semantics, it could be argued that the concurrences of topics/ideas in the realms of production and consumption of two different eras may constitute a basic structural system –indeed a rudimentary working 'code'– for the representation of Ancient Egypt in the British Museum's displays.

In addition, some studies of contemporary displays have concluded that the representation of certain object-themes is achieved by the articulation of ideas into complex systems. For instance, Pearce (1990: 158) noted that displays assume 'a cluster of *norms* through which "Ancient Egypt" and "Classical Greece" can be realised' (*my emphasis*). In addition, Wood & Cotton (1999) have demonstrated that exhibits on Prehistory at the British Museum convey 'stereotypes' that are formulated throughout the representation of conventional topics such as 'hunting', 'trade' and 'exchange', 'farming' and 'burial'.

This body of literature confirms that representation systems function through the systematisation of ideas. Furthermore, recent research on display representation has developed fresh arguments that separate formalistic issues from their abstract content. For instance, revisiting Moser's iconographic analysis on human ancestors, Scott (2005: 32) has argued that the use of icons 'serves to communicate the essence of what it means to be primitive and, by implication, prehistoric: caves, skins, nakedness, hairiness, dark skin, and rocky [...] landscapes'. This explanation of the representation of the notion of 'Prehistory' moves forward from an iconographic perspective to an approach that focuses on the essential elements of the object-theme.

Conventional approaches to representation have provided further understanding of the manner in which complex systems of ideas articulate knowledge via different formats and through time. As explained before, Mitchell (1993: 13) proposes that the dinosaur 'stereotype' is articulated through a series of ideas, which are articulated in distinctive ways by different types of media: descriptions, narratives, graphic media and displays. Furthermore, this researcher goes beyond the conventional dichotomies of visual/verbal language by conceiving of representation as a *system of ideas* (Mitchell 1993:13 *my emphasis*). How these ideas are structured for the transmission/production of knowledge on displays is the central enquiry of the following section.

### 2.4.3 Structuration

According to Moser (1998: 4), the aim of the emerging field of 'archaeological representation' is to investigate how different media communicate: for this reason it is not the theme of representation but the methods that 'convince us of the inevitability of that theme' that demands interrogation. This argument suggests, although perhaps not strongly enough, that certain methods are selected to represent certain themes by a given medium. Thus, investigation of display language can be addressed through three different strategies.

- Studying how a theme-language has been deployed by a specific medium throughout the time, an approach that has been followed by Moser (1998, 2006).
- Analysing how theme-language has been employed in specific epochs in relation to variable media, an approximation explicitly developed by Mitchell (1998: 51).
- Examining how a theme-language has been formulated in variable forms of manifestation within a specific medium, an investigation that entails the examination of the system of communication/ signification/ representation of a given theme that has been developed by types of exhibits and /or different display technologies.

This thesis clearly follows the last strategy, since –as explained in Chapter 1–, it analyses the way in which the notion of ‘ancient civilisation’ was articulated by distinctive modes of display during the nineteenth century. Yet, in order to pursue this task, we need to explore how ‘notions’ are incorporated into Structural Semantics.

Structural Semantics accepts that there are complex signs or ‘notions’, whose contents constitute semantic systems (Eco 2005a: 64). According to Eco (2005a: 64), these semantic systems are structured according to a determined scale, as follows:

- ‘Notions’ are constructed through the emission of messages, which are in turn composed on the basis of S-Codes.
- S-Codes are systems (or structures) that are composed of structural elements that can subsist independently of the communicative or signification purpose. Therefore, the structural elements can be ideas.
- S-Codes usually stand in opposition to other S-Codes. The relationship between S-Codes is determined by R-Codes, which are the rules that determine the type of association between the structural elements of a S-Code with those of another S-Code (Eco 2005a: 64).

Moser’s work on display representations of Ancient Egypt (2006: 209) concurs with the basic principles of ordering of Structural Semantics since shows that the British Museum’s exhibits represented Ancient Egypt as a inverted mirror-image of Ancient Greece: while the first was associated with ideas of stationary or retrograded culture, the latter was usually represented as an ‘advancing culture moving from infancy to unrivalled excellence’. Thus, we can argue that the S-Code of ‘Ancient Egypt’ and the S-Code of ‘Ancient Greece’ were related to each other by a R-Code that ruled opposition between their respective structural elements. Similarly, Mitchell (1998 32) has suggested that the attraction to dinosaurs lies in the fact that these creatures are our ‘monstrous doubles’ –both twins and antagonist–, thus the key elements of their representation usually stands in opposition to the self-image of humans.

As with any code, S-Codes are basically derived from the pre-existent competence in which any communicative performance is based.. Thus, S-Codes originate in the social norms of language: the way in which a given culture speaks about a ‘notion’. Therefore, we could expect to find the elements of the S-Codes as recurrent topics of representation of a notion, independently of the medium employed. Considering that every representational mode constitutes a different language ‘since meaning is constituted in both materials and technique’ (Moser & Smiles 2005: 3), diverse media have their own particular ways of expressing the code of a given notion. In fact, it could be argued that the S-Codes are the units of communication that facilitate the transmission of ‘notions’ between different types of languages.



Eco (2005b: 10) suggests the main characteristic of Semantic research is ‘to suggest a unified method to approach phenomena of different nature and hitherto of irreducible nature’. This section has shown that Structural Semantics offers an adequate model for understanding displays, which not only integrates assumptions already posed (and proved) by theoretical approaches previously employed in Museum Studies, Archaeology, and Anthropology. Moreover, this model satisfies many of the weaknesses found in those approaches, offering innovative ways of looking at the manner in which displays function as a medium for the loading and unloading of ‘ideas’, process that serves to convey complex ‘notions’.

Structural Semantics have hitherto not been employed for the examination of displays. This thesis constitutes a first attempt at introducing Structural Semantics in the field of Archaeological Representation. In other words, Semantic Research here is considered as a valuable theory-laden methodology by which we can address the ways in which knowledge of the past is constructed by the discipline of archaeology (Moser 2002: 280) through the means of its culture of displaying.

Employing Structural Semiotics for the analysis of displays has a series of consequences for the manner in which the theme of this thesis is conceptualised, approached and analysed. All these issues, which belong to the realm of the methodology, are clarified in the following section.

## **2.5. METHODOLOGY**

From the conceptual point of view, this thesis assumes an innovative definition of its object of study. A ‘display of an ancient civilisation’ is here defined by its nature and purpose: a three-dimensional spectacle in which a given culture/society is represented as both ‘ancient’ and ‘civilised’. In other words, the binary notion of ‘ancient civilisation’ corresponds to a ‘background category’ (Cf. Karp & Kratz 2000:201) through which some exhibitions structure ideas about a past society. Henceforth, the manner in which these displays structure ideas into a tangible form to make them intelligible to the audience constitutes the central enquiry of this research.

Theorists of archaeological representation have recently proposed that ‘we first need to examine how images embody ideas in order to develop ways of seeing’ (Moser & Smiles 2005: 8). Using Structural Semantics, this thesis follows a similar objective: it aims to uncover the elemental structure of communication (Eco 2005b: 57) that displays employ to convey intelligible ideas about the notion of ‘ancient civilisation’.

This research is based on a series of principles that in conjunction constitute an innovative approach to the subject of archaeological representation. This approach, henceforth called

Semantic Research, proposes that the notion of ‘ancient civilisation’ was a complex sign formulated and actualised on the basis of the articulation of an S-Code. This S-Code constitutes the structuring system of ideas through which the production and the interpretation of displays work.

Eco (2005a: 10) has stated that Semantic Research implies testing ‘against factual evidence, to individualise all the phenomena that fit and do not fit with it, in order to restructure it, extend it, or correct it’. Only if this operation ‘is successful, our semiotic model will manage to maintain the complexity of the field, establishing a structure, and therefore, transforming the field into a system’ (Eco 2005a: 10). The process of testing requires that the S-Code is applied by deduction, ‘without pretending that it actually is the real structure of the field... [this is due to the fact that] the semiotic research only makes sense if the structure of the semiotic field is considered as an imprecise entity that the method proposes to clarify’ (Eco 2005a: 10). On the basis of these principles, this thesis proposes a new methodology for the study of exhibits (Figure 8):

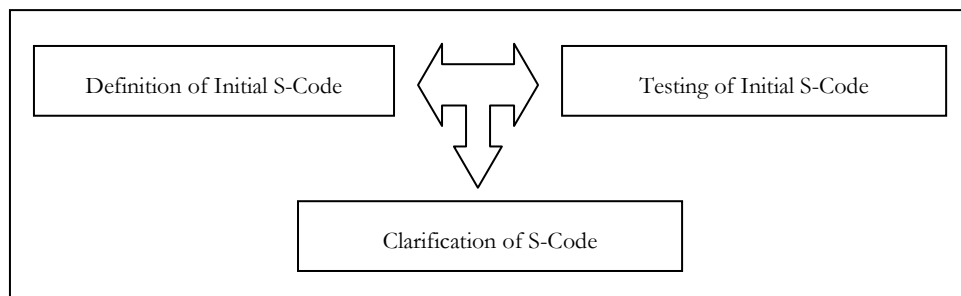


Figure 8. Methodology of Semantic Research

- **Definition of an initial S-Code:** to begin with, the general structure of codes underlining the ‘notion’ of ancient civilisation will be established. This S-Code will be inferred by analysing the manner in which the ‘notion’ of ancient civilisation has been constructed in Western thought on the basis of an independent source: literary production.
- **Testing of the initial S-Code:** the initial S-Code will be tested against factual evidence. As factual evidence, this thesis has chosen a body of historical exhibits, whose main subject-theme was the representation of Mesoamerica. This selection mainly responds to the fact that, in comparison with displays on Ancient Egypt, Ancient Greece or Ancient Assyria, the representation of Mesoamerica in nineteenth-century displays is rather under-investigated. It must be noted that the body of exhibits chosen for examination corresponds to displays whose production and consumption did not take place within institutional museums, a characteristic that allows us to examine the dichotomy between academic and popular spectacles during the nineteenth century.

- **Clarification of the S-Code:** on the basis of the testing, the S-Code of the ‘notion of ancient civilisation’ will be inferred. This phrase will also determine the strategies that displays employ to its articulation.

A clear methodology will be followed for the investigation of the display strategies. This is influenced by Moser’s (2006: 4) method, which distinguishes three sets of conventions employed by displays for the shaping of knowledge: acquisition –the content of the displays–, arrangement –the context and the manner in which objects are distributed– and, reception –the response of the visitors to the exhibits– (Moser 2006: 4). However, these methodological steps are here adapted/enriched by Structural Semantic theory. As a result, the methodology points out to three key realms of the act of displaying:

- **Production:** this refers to the material and immaterial construction of the display, and its particular strategies. It answers questions regarding the types of materials involved and their forms of acquisition, the technology of production, the possible sources of inspiration, the agents of production and general decision-making process involved in the physical and conceptual construction of the exhibit
- **Representation:** this refers to the manner in which displays convey ideas through the operation the technological, narrative, visual, textual, three-dimensional and other representational strategies. It thus analyses how the intended message was articulated for transaction purposes. The criteria scrutinised for this category were: the type of signs involved, mechanisms of representation, interaction with other interpretative aids, and technology of communication.
- **Interpretation:** this addresses how some visitors responded to the exhibits, particularly its response to the intended messages to the exhibit. It focuses on topics related to audience range of the exhibition, interpretative background, evaluation, and reception. Particular interest is given here to the coincidences and discrepancies between the intended messages of the exhibits and the views expressed by the visitors.

## 2.6. CONCLUSIONS

This chapter examined conceptual and theoretical issues about displays on the basis of previous investigations on material culture, museum studies, archaeological representation and recent developments in Semiotics, in order to propose a new grounding for academic research. It proposes that exhibits, exhibitions or displays are defined as discrete spectacles that derived from human creation whose purpose is showing something intentionally in order to communicate, signify, represent and make ideas legible to a viewer. From this general definition,

this section analysed how displays have been conceptualised and studied following three theoretical approaches that centre on their communication, signification and representation issues.

The communication approach has been useful for analysing the exhibition components from a functional point of view. According to communication theory, exhibits are composed of producers, contents-contexts, and viewers. Through time, theorists have emphasised the active role that the display and the viewers play in the displaying system. However, communication theory does not often address the production phase of exhibits. Nor does this approach explain how objects acquire the meaning that is transmitted by the display.

On the basis of semiotics, signification approaches have explained how objects are transformed in signs, thus, providing insight on meaning-making processes applied to material culture. Yet, initial grounding in Saussurean semiotics has underestimated the role of a conventional system of social shared meanings for the encoding and decoding of signification. The involvement of this key component of the signification process, however, has been provided by models derived from Peircean semiology, which introduce the notion of 'interpretative referents'. Taking into account this view, recent theorising on Communication Semiology has been able to integrate how meaning making takes part of the transmission of information at displays.

The manner in which displays participate in the formulation of meaning and, thus, knowledge has been tackled by representation approaches, which have focused on analysing how display languages work. Such a programme has been approximated through three separate research endeavours that focus on the nature, characteristics and dynamics of textual, visual, and textual/visual approaches. Each of these approaches have deepened understanding of the manner in which displays communicate, shape, and even produce meaning in the technical, conceptual and theoretical realms of archaeological practice. However, the separation among these perspectives imposes a dichotomy has become a limitation in comprehending how visual and textual technologies complement and interact with each other. Furthermore, the intrinsic theoretical grounding of these models is not adequate for examining how three-dimensional language operates.

This research moves forward to propose a new integrated model, which incorporates the benefits of the previous approaches, but also overcomes their shortcomings, by acquiring a fresh perspective on how displays work. This model is based in Structural Semantics and proposes that the mechanics of displaying involve a communication/signification/representation system, which is governed by a 'code'. The function of the code is asymmetrical on the side of the producer/curator and that of the interpreter/visitor. The producer/curator articulates direct relationship with referents to formulate a representation, which involves an interpretation *a priori*; whereas the

intepreter/visitor operates indirect relationships with the 'code' to restore the representation articulated by the display. The systematisation of Structural Semantics allows us to escape from the textual-visual dichotomy to propose that the main aim of the display is to convey ideas formulated by the producer in order to make them legible for the interpreters. Although previous research had already proposed that exhibits transmitted ideas, the Structural Semantic Model establishes that ideas are the central semantic entity of displays, thus demanding research attention of the ways in which exhibits articulate systems of ideas for certain exhibit-themes to make complex notions understandable to the audience. Structural issues about Semantic theory explain how 'notions' are incorporated in displaying systems, through the formulation of S-Codes.

This section finishes by proposing a method for semantic research, which is applicable for the aims of the present thesis. This methodology indicates that for inferring the S-Codes that articulated the notion of 'ancient civilisation' in displays it is necessary to test an initial structure of ideas against factual evidence. Structuring this initial modelling about the notion of 'ancient civilisation' in western thought, particularly in nineteenth-century scholarly discourse, is the aim of the following chapter.

## CHAPTER 3

### **Defining an Initial Structural Code for the Notion of ‘Ancient Civilisation’ in Nineteenth-Century Western Thought**

Following the method proposed in Chapter 2, this chapter presents an initial definition of the Structural S-Code of the notion of ‘ancient civilisation’. This S-Code is inferred by analysing the manner in which ideas about ancient civilisations have historically been constructed in Western thought on the basis of independent sources: literary productions. This investigation draws heavily on the history of archaeology, focusing on the relationship between its practice and the study of ancient civilisations. Therefore, it employs archaeological discourses that focus on the interpretation of those societies, particularly on the main theoretical models developed by influential scholars who have addressed the subject under examination. The research also employs historiographic analysis, in order to capture the socio-cultural contexts in which archaeological interpretations of ancient civilisations were produced and disseminated. Literature on heritage studies and studies on anthropology is used to infer the manner in which the past of the ancient civilisations was configured as a legacy of significant importance for present concerns.

This investigation is not a history of the development of archaeological studies of ancient civilisations. Rather, it is concerned with the conceptual underpinnings of the notion of ‘Ancient Civilisation’ from a theoretical point of view. It does not pretend to be a complete or comprehensive analysis of the subject, but a working template. According to the scope of this research, the investigation will particularly focus on the nineteenth century.

Defining what is (and what is not) an ‘ancient civilisation’ proves to be one of the most difficult tasks for archaeological enquiry. The reasons for this are many. Firstly, until now, no one has hitherto analysed the meaning of this notion, nor does a systematic study exist on the development of its significance over time. Secondly, there is ample bibliography that refers to or employs the term, but takes it for granted. Furthermore, during the nineteenth century the notion of ‘ancient civilisation’ was neither absolute, nor monolithic, nor static. There were multiple ways of understanding this notion and it developed over time. However, within the diversity of conceptualizations there were some common traits, which were constantly repeated, recycled and thus consolidated through history. Thus, in order to propose a structure model of

is signification, I seek to identify underpinning elements that have formed a recognisable semiotic structure

For analytical reasons, this study analyses separately the two components that conform the notion of ‘ancient civilisation’: the concept of ‘**ancient**’ (and its related notions, antiquity, ancientness, etc) and that of ‘**civilisation**’, a derivation of the idea of cultural complexity.

### **3.1 THE CONCEPT OF ‘ANCIENT’**

First and foremost, the notion of ‘ancient’ is a function of that of time. Thus, it depends on a given conception of time, which is not absolute, but rather heterogeneous according to different cultures, époques and even cosmological or intellectual frameworks that may coexist at the same time.

As Karlson (2001:45) states, the concept of time is the foundation of all kinds of archaeological work. However, until very recently the concept of time was regarded as unproblematic. Fortunately, the last decades have seen significant developments in evaluating the conceptual underpinnings of the notion of time in archaeology (e.g. Shanks & Tilley 1987; Murray 1999b).

A major point of criticism of this body of literature is that archaeologists tend to assume an essentialist view of time, which makes it appear as measured, abstract and natural (Shanks & Tilley 1987: 118-136). In comparison, potential alternatives of conceptualising time have depicted it as a relative entity derived from experience, subjective perception and social consensus (cf. Gadner 2001: 35-47).

In its most elementary form, the act of timing means ‘determining whether change –which may be recurrent or non recurrent– happens before, after, or simultaneously’ (Elias 1998: 257). Since establishing a relationship between two or more continua of changes implies linking at least three elements –the continuum of changes, the framework reference (or standard of measurements), and the people who connect–, we can conclude that the act of timing is a social activity, and therefore, time is a cultural construct (Elias 1998: 257).

Useful frameworks for understanding the processes of construction of time derive from recent theoretical work based on phenomenology, historiography, cultural studies and sociology (e.g.; Calinescu 1987; Lowenthal 1985; Elias 1998; Karlson 2001; Olivier 2001). According to these views, the notion of the ‘ancient’ (and the related concept of ‘antiquity’) can be thus conceptualised as a product of an act of timing in which a series of mechanisms took place. To understand the consequences of such process, we need to analyse the manner in which the conceptualisation and categorization of time has changed throughout history.

Four criteria serve as analytical tools to understand the transformations of timing in Western modernity: periodisation, duration, transformation and qualification.

The first criterion is *periodisation*, an essential manifestation of the act of timing since, following Olivier (2001: 61), time is conventionally perceived as a succession of distinct instants. *Periodisation* implies two processes: the division of time into units (epochs, periods), as well as their ordering according to a given sequence.

However, time is also constructed as a measure of *duration* (Olivier 2001: 61). Time-duration, a second category of analysis, is often understood in geometrical terms. As a consequence of an operation in which 'time is effectively reduced into a space' (Gadner 2001: 35), duration is usually equated to longitude. The construction of this function of time –materialised in the image of the time-line– not only concerns its treatment as an 'objective reality', in which human action takes place within established chronologies or other forms of socially-construct forms of time (Gadner 2001: 25) but also leads to enquiries on *time-length*.

*Time-length* is the manner in which the extension of time has been perceived and measured, which in turn, questions how the frontiers have been established and calibrated in relation to research on the past. Although periodisation and duration entail basic functions of timing, the temporal character of time is intrinsically related to transformation. This third criterion of analysis not only provides dynamics to the notion of time, indeed 'the idea of time as an arrow' (Moro-Abadia 2002: 57). It also poses enquiries on the direction of time, and thus, the *qualification* of the past in relation to the present, a dilemma that cultures and individuals have tried to respond to in quite different ways (Lowenthal 1985: 74). The qualification of time regarding 'Others' is another character of ancientness.

*Periodisation, duration, transformation and qualification* are intrinsically related functions of time. Their use of these criteria for the analysis of the notion of 'ancientness' thus entails some overlapping. Yet, by analysing key moments in the history of the concept of time, we are able to explain the relationships of the analytical functions, which in turn, help to define an elemental conceptual structure of the notion of *ancientness*.

During the nineteenth century, Western modern thought developed a notion of the 'ancient', which, without being absolute or unique, presented certain general traits. These traits derived from the particular view about time and ontological mechanisms of timing that had been developed in previous centuries, but acquired a particular significance during the period in question.

Nineteenth-century Western conceptions of time inherited the views from the Middle Ages that proposed that time was perceived as irreversible and linear (Calinescu 1987: 53). The notion of change was not critical for the medieval mind: the present was often conceived as a continuum of previous epochs (Trigger 1989: 34). Renaissance humanists added the idea that time meant



change, thus they came to realise that the past was separated from the present (Lowenthal 1985: 78). This dynamic vision of time was articulated into the conventional division of history in three periods, antiquity, middle ages, and modernity (Calinescu 1987: 20). As such, antiquity (the noun of ‘the ancient’) was created by four acts of timing: Periodisation, duration, transformation and qualification. All of these four categories entailed several ontological operations that can be summarised as follows:

### 3.1.1. Periodisation

*Periodisation* is characterised by four conceptual operations:

Division and sequence: By the fourteenth century, a series of economic, political, and cultural changes had operated first in Italy and then, in various parts of Europe, making people conscious of the transition of time (see Plumb 2001: 9-10). As result of this, Renaissance humanists began to think of their era as a distinctive modern period. This derived from an ontological operation of time: Humanists constructed a succession of sharply distinctive ages, separated by ruptures: the ancient, the middle, and the modern periods (Lowenthal 1985: 23). The rupture between modernity and the Medieval Ages was marked by the fall of Constantinople in 1453 since this event resulted in the flight of many Greeks to many parts of Europe, particularly to Italy, a migration was thought to have helped fuel the Renaissance. The Medieval Ages were separated from antiquity by the fall of the Roman Empire. Following the humanist and poet Petrarch, pre-Christian times were referred as *antiqua* (Calinescu 1987: 11). As a consequence of this, antiquity became also associated with paganism.

During the eighteenth century, historians popularised the division of ancient, medieval and modern history (Daniel 1962: 15). This period was crucial for the universalisation of the notion, since key works of the ‘true golden era of World History’ incorporated and employed this historical sequence (Daniel 1962: 15). As explained in Chapter 1, the nineteenth century meta-narrative of progress integrated this tripartite notion of history, along with others, including that of savagery, barbarism and civilisation (Errington 1998: 14-15). 1800s were also of significant importance for the popularisation of the notion of ‘ancientness’: major theoretical contributions to history and archaeology used the term ‘ancient’ in their titles, including H. Maine *Ancient Law* (1861) and L. H. Morgan *Ancient Society* (1877).

Contrasting: As result of the growing familiarity with historical and literary texts from ancient Greece and Rome, Renaissance scholars ‘came to realise that each period of history had to be understood in its own terms (Trigger 1989: 3). Thus, they qualified historical periods. Antiquity became associated with an ideal luminescent époque, whereas a dark age separated the ancient times from modernity, a period conceived as an epoch of emergence and awakening (Calinescu

1987: 20). Humanists thought of their times as an era of revolution, a feeling materialised by the fact that the Renaissance was an époque of new intellectual and geographical discoveries, including the exploration of the New World (Plumb 2001: 9).

Renaissance thinkers admired the values of the Roman and Greek Cultures, an appreciation that rapidly extended into the fields of art and architecture. Furthermore, a habitual perspective of humanists was the notion of revival, which was 'associated with acts of unearthing and resurrecting' (Lowenthal 1985: 77). In concordance, interest grew in the recovering, excavation and collecting of antiquities, a fashion that eventually spread to the rest of Europe (Trigger 1989: 37). These practices constitute embryonic stages of the archaeological practice that continued from this period to the nineteenth century.

Remoteness: The changes that Europe suffered from the 14<sup>th</sup> century onwards meant that scholars came to realise that the past was separated from the present (Trigger 1989: 25). 'Nothing about the classical past was more critical for humanists than its sheer distance from' the modernity. Thus, antiquity was seen as a period remote in history: indeed, over a thousand of years separated humanists from the Classical period. However, the expression of time remoteness regarding the ancient period was not only a matter of chronology, because time was also equated with space. Thus, antiquity also meant foreignness (Lowenthal 1985: 78). Such an association continued to the present. As explained in Chapter 1, Golden & Toohley (1997: 2) have proposed that the 'ancient world' has been conventionally constructed as inherently inaccessible and foreign in literature.

Comparison and association: The famous seventeenth-century *Querelle* between *Antiquus* and *Modernus* reflected, in an intellectual way, the operation of comparison between modernity and antiquity that had been articulated since the Renaissance (Lowenthal 1985: 87-102; Calinescu 1987: 14-25). This philosophical debate soon evolved into a new dichotomy: many 1600s scholars concluded that scientific knowledge was cumulative and, thus science essentially progressive, whereas artistic endeavour was basically decaying after reaching its peak during Classical times (Lowenthal 1985: 92). As a consequence, by the eighteenth century, art as much as culture was incorporated within the philosophical temporal framework known as the 'Chain of Being', whose major premise was that everything in the universe had its place in a divinely hierarchical order that resembled the organic stages of life: birth, maturity and decay (Lovejoy 1936: 25-26 in Calinescu 1987: 26). Life-cycle historical frameworks consolidated during the following years. An example of this can be found in the work of Winckelmann (1717-1778). Effectively, his 'Chain of Art' expressed that art had evolved, reaching its plenitude during the Classical times, and decayed towards the present (Barasch 2000: 312-321). Similarly, Herder (1774-1803) expanded the organic analogy to cultural historical development (Lowenthal 1985: 145).

Organic views of culture and art persisted until the nineteenth century, establishing mainstream cyclical frameworks of history: however, they implicitly entailed an ongoing and increasing tension between progressive and degenerationist views of history (Paz in Calinescu 1987; Trigger 1989). As this century went by, this debate turned into a conflicting tension between the idea of back-looking arts and that of forward-looking sciences (Lowenthal 1985: 102), which was key for the articulation of scholarly discussions about culture and civilisation. Two key acts of timing eventually dissolved this conflict: *Extension* and *Transformation*.

### **3.1.2. Extension**

As Gadner (2001) states ‘time is one of the key elements in most attempts to define archaeology’s disciplinary distinctiveness’. In effect, many historians of archaeology (e.g. Renfrew & Bahn 1991: 22-23; Stiebing 1994: 29-40; Schnapp 1996: 275-291) agree that the consolidation of archaeology was the result of two achievements: the development of the cardinal principles of archaeological chronology and the establishment of the antiquity of humankind. For the purposes of this Chapter, we need observe these achievements in relation to acts of timing, specifically time-depth, in order to understand their implications regarding the configuration of the notion of ‘antiquity’ that took place during the nineteenth century.

During the sixteenth, seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, the age of the earth was estimated following biblical genealogies; however, dating was for a long time a matter of controversy (Stiebing 1994: 36-37). Whereas rabbinical authorities estimated that the earth had been created about 3700 BC, Pope Clement II dated its formation to 5199 BC. By the seventeenth century, the age of the earth was extended: many scholars considered that human history comprehended six thousand years (Stiebing 1994: 37). By the turn of the eighteenth century, academic literature followed the estimation of the Archbishop James Usher who, on the basis of biblical genealogies, had set the beginning of past history at 4004 BC (Trigger 1989: 31). This date remained valid until the first half of the nineteenth century (Greene 1983: 12).

Even though during the first half of the nineteenth century, British ethnologists had accepted a 2000 years chronology established by biblical schemes (Stocking 1987: 74), a much longer time scale did not break until 1860. That year, on the basis of new typological and geological investigations, a meeting of the British Association accepted that the antiquity of man was ‘remote beyond any of which we have hitherto found trace’ (Schnapp 1996: 277-291). Thus, past history was liberated from limitations in terms of depth. This posed questions regarding time lengthening and delimitation.

Lengthening and Delimitation: Until the mid-nineteenth century, the perception of past time was characterised by a stretched chronology. However, scientific developments during the 1860s

allowed the extension of past time, indeed its liberation from its biblical constraints (Renfrew & Bahn 1991: 22; Greene 1983: 31-32; Trigger 1989: 73-86; Schnapp 1996: 310; Stiebing 1994: 29-51). This operation was of extreme importance for the history of archaeology, since it led to the configuration of the notion of 'Prehistory'.

The term 'Prehistory' came into general use after the publication of J. Lubbock's *Prehistoric Times* (1865), which referred to, and thus categorised, a period before any written history. It could be argued that the introduction of 'Prehistory' into the timing of the past had three important consequences for the reconfiguration of the notion of 'antiquity'. First of all the insertion of Prehistory (as an additional period to history) broke with the tripartite periodization of history that had survived for more than four hundred years. Secondly it imposed a new temporal frontier to the time-length of antiquity. This temporal frontier was marked by another cultural criterion for the division of time: the historical resource, in other words, the emergence of writing. Thus, as a third consequence of the introduction of Prehistory, writing came to be closely associated to the nature of antiquity. This association was key for the configuration of the nineteenth-century meta-narrative of progress (Figure 1). As Errington (1998: 15) has rightly pointed out, 'literacy came to draw a clear line between the primitive and the archaic [...] without literacy, a people could not enter history'. The last assertion can be expanded to argue that without literacy people could not write history, and thus could not have past-history. Therefore, the notion of 'ancientness' entails a historical depth on its own.

Expansion and Inclusion: Although Renaissance thinking associated antiquity directly with Classical Antiquity –that is the Greek and Roman Cultures–, it also incorporated other cultures in the ancient world, including the Egyptian and the Assyrian (Daniel 1962: 15; *contra* Trigger 1989: 39). As explained in Chapter 1, the explosion of archaeological research during the mid-nineteenth century led to the expansion of the ancient world. This expansion comprehended two ways: a vertical dimension of time and a horizontal dimension of cultural diversity.

Firstly, in vertical direction, archaeological research and decipherment of ancient systems of writing generated outline chronologies that extended 3000 years to the history of antiquity (Trigger 1989: 39-40). It is important to note that as a consequence of the extension of the time-depth of antiquity, during the rest of the nineteenth century (and a significant part of the twentieth century), archaeologists found a large time-space not only for the adjustment of chronologies, but also for the interpretation of cultural change.

Secondly, as Chapter 1 has explained, from the 1800s onwards, archaeological investigations extended in a horizontal way to many parts of the world. Thus, along with the discoveries of the Mycenaean, Sumerian, Minoan and Hittitian cultures came the rediscovery of Ancient China, India, Peru and Mexico (for a review see Daniel 1973: 69-135; Stiebing 1994: 55-227). In fact, from the point of view of Stiebing (1994: 75, 109, 124, 193, 213), from the mid-1800, Egyptian,

Near Eastern, Aegean, Roman, Indian, and New World archaeologies came into an age of significant development, if not maturity.

Taken into the account the above, it is not strange to find that the major theoretical contribution on the subject of antiquity of the nineteenth century, –L. Morgan’s *Ancient Society* (1877)– incorporated the study of a mosaic of ancient cultures, including the Greek, the Roman, the Etruscan, the Aztec, the Chinese, the Celtic, to mention a few. However, what is more important to note is that in this work the idea of antiquity seems to have lost its temporal specificity. The incorporation of the Aztec culture into Morgan’s scheme serves to illustrate this point. This scholar knew that Aztecs developed long before the fifth century, the date that marked the end of Western antiquity. However, he still considered this culture as an ancient one. Therefore, it appears that during the 1800s the notion of ‘ancient culture’ was conceptually redefined, loosing its chronological constraints.

Redefining: The incorporation of new cultures into the ancient world that did not fit within the chronological constraints imposed on it at the end of its length, for instance, the New World ancient cultures, meant that antiquity was actually redefined. This redefining implied that the ancient became more definable in terms of cultural traits, rather than in terms of chronology. How this process took place is not clear yet. However, it seems that it had to do with acts of timing.

Throughout the nineteenth century, the development of archaeology was stimulated by ‘a sense of discontinuity and diversity of origins of European civilisation’ (Trigger 1989: 44). Indeed, termination gave the past ‘a sense of completion, of stability, of permanence’, which allowed it to be ordered and domesticated it (Lowenthal 1985: 62). Thus, it can be proposed that by the nineteenth century, the notion of ‘ancientness’ had not lost some essential components of signification. It remained a function of time-rupture and periodization, and, thus, termination. Following Lowenthal (1985: 62), this sense of completion made the ancient past comprehensive. Furthermore, it also froze antiquity to make it part of a process of transformation.

### **3.1.3. Transformation**

Both progressive and decaying views of history have a long and complex lineage. According to Harris (2001: 25), evolutionary doctrines were ‘an essential part of the Biblical account of the origin of humanity’. However, the Judeo-Christian tradition is also the source of the modern idea of decadence (Calinescu 1987: 152; Stocking 1987: 16). As explained before, during the seventeenth century, the famous *Querelle* between *Ancients* and *Moderns* did not dissolve the controversy between progressivism and degenerationism thinking, but actually defined its major subjects of debate: science and culture. However, how science and culture have developed over time demanded defining the direction of time.

Direction: Until the eighteenth century, time was generally conceived as moving towards future decay or degeneration (Harris 2001: 25). The dominant intellectual models emphasised the process of degeneration, since 'History –recorded rather than conjectured– provided plenty of evidence of decline' and 'there was no secular historical model for indefinite progress' (Harris 2001: 16). This changed during the second half of 1700s, when traditions within the Scientific Revolution started to pose problems for the sacred account of the history of the earth. By these times, Scottish and French philosophers, mainly inspired by the works of Adam Smith (1723-1790) and Jacques Turgot (1727-1781), initiated a more systematic speculation on the process of evolution of human society (Stocking 1987: 14). This resulted in a general and scientific formulation of social development –the Science of Man–, which was based on the belief of human unity and its progress, a word that the philosophers employed to convey a sense of moral satisfaction (Harris 2001: 25-29).

British socio-theoretical thinking evolved in the shadow of the Industrial Revolution (Eriksen & Nielsen 2001: 16). In a world of innovation and inventions the Victorians developed an obsession with the idea of change, but likewise were fascinated with the past (Lowenthal 1985: 90-95; Bowler 1989: 40). Fascination with ancient civilisations spread out in society thanks to paintings, travel journals, reports and newspaper headlines of excavations (Bowler 1989: 40). As a result of this, the Victorian era saw a successive passion for all things Roman, Greek, Egyptian, Chinese and early English (Lowenthal 1985: 97) both in architecture and arts.

British and American antiquarians were largely uncertain whether the general course of human history had been one of development, degeneration or cyclical change (Trigger 1989: 71). The tension between developmentalist and degenerationist views of time persisted until the mid-nineteenth century in British anthropology due to the predominance of Pritchardian ethnology, a school of thought that was more interested in origins, since it supported monogenism during the debate between this theoretical position and polygenist interpretations of human genesis (Stocking 1987: 47-49; Harris 2001: 83-91).

It is especially significant for the topic of this research to consider Romanticism and, particularly, the interpretation of ruins of ancient cultures, which tended to support degenerationist perceptions of time (Calinescu 1987). The widely read works of Wilkinson on Ancient Egypt, Layard on Niniveh and Babylon, and Stephens on the Maya did not contradict theological history, but rather appeared to reinforce a romantic image of decay and destruction emanating from the ruins, which tended to sustain a degenerationist view of human history (Carpenter 1950: 6-16). However, this view also emphasised two characteristics of the notion of 'ancientness': the fact that it was bygone and faraway. It also stressed the idea that some ancient cultures had achieved a high state of development and then declined. Furthermore, as explained in Chapter 1, the idea of ruin evoked anxiety regarding the destiny of present societies, which gave to the idea of the 'ancientness' (the deep past) a linkage with the future.

During the second half of the nineteenth century, progressivist views gained terrain over degenerationist views, especially due to the establishment of evolutionism. Contrary to popular opinion, the word evolution was not introduced by Darwinian theory. Nor did this framework postulate that natural organisms developed according to a direction towards progress, since it proposed that natural selection worked more or less randomly, thus using the branching tree as the metaphorical image of natural development (Bowler 1989). Instead, the relation between evolution and progress was formulated by a prominent group of Victorian socio-cultural theorists. Among them, was H. Maine (1822-1888), the first of a new generation to attempt to reconstruct the early steps of social development in his *Ancient Law* (1861), a work that proposed a 'stage theory' in which differences were explained in terms of varying speeds of ascent up a uniform ladder of progress. This model was then followed by E. Tylor (1812-1917) whose *Researches in the History of Mankind* (2005 [1865]) proposed that the march towards civilisation could be seen as a gradual refinement of social institutions. Furthermore, this scholar assumed a model of parallel evolution up to a single hierarchy of stages, which preserved the Victorian's sense of their own cultural superiority. J. Lubbock shared this view: his *Origin of Civilisation* (1870) presented a synthesis of archaeology and anthropology by revealing the essence of the comparative method. This method assumed that technologically primitive people represent exact equivalents of earlier stages in the development of more advanced societies. Later on, in 1877, in *Ancient Society* (1877), L. Morgan (1818-1881) proposed the most complex model of social evolutionism of the nineteenth century, which was based on the prevailing view that there was only one path of cultural phenomena to be followed by all.

Alongside these works, the popularisation of evolutionary theory owes much to the work of H. Spencer (1820-1903), who from the 1850s onwards explicitly equated the improvement of society to biological evolution (Spencer 1864: 20-25). In this sense, some revisions of the history of evolutionary theory have rejected the idea that Spencer developed Social Darwinism, rather proposing that Darwin formulated a trend of Biological Spencerianism (Kuper 1988, Stocking 1987).

Social Evolutionists developed not only distinctive schemes of social development, but also sophisticated theories and ideas about progress, which were fundamental for the development of archaeology during the rest of the nineteenth century. These theoretical underpinnings revolutionised the perception of time-transformation by making qualifications through mapping.

### **3.1.4. Mapping**

Evolutionism had a profound impact on anthropology for it shaped analysis and images of other societies. The most well known formulation derived from this was that of the 'Primitive',

an idea of the 'Other' that was based on a further act of timing: *allochronism* (Fabian 1983: xi, 32. 148). In effect, many 19<sup>th</sup> century scholars not only depicted contemporary 'Others' as their primitive ancestors (Bowler 1989: 11; Clifford 1986: 101-102), but also often treated travel to distant places as if it were transport into earlier times (Fabian 1983: 18). The point here is that allochronic evolutionist anthropology reformulated the notion of time-transformation with a pervasive discourse, in which the 'Other' was understood as belonging to a different, earlier time within a supposedly linear, evolutionary historical scheme.

Evolutionism impacted the academic and social views of ancient cultures. As explained in Chapter 1, Victorians perceived themselves as the heirs of Classical civilisations; but the modern descendants of these cultures were conceived of as degenerate remains, thus configuring another manifestation of 'Otherness'. Non-Classical ancient civilisations were additionally conceived of as the past of 'Others'. Evolutionism stimulated analysis of how certain societies achieved cultural complexity and what were the traits that defined 'civilisation'. Typically, the definition of civilisation was then set up in contrast with the idea of primitivism. Following a conventional framework of 'alterity', 'Others' typically become the inverted mirror image of the 'Self': hence, non-Western cultures were conceived as 'uncivilised, past, and subordinated', whereas Western society was represented as 'civilised, present, superior and dominating' (Bowler 1989; Clifford 1986; Fabian 1983; Kuper 1988).

During the second half of the nineteenth century, allochronism, the persistence of the idea of degeneration, and the loose framework of discussion of social progression derived from its analogy with growth, meant that the arrow of historical progression acquired a new direction. Victorians then completed a series of acts of timing by formulating a cyclical model of evolutionism, in which 'they saw each civilisation making its own contribution and then passing the torch on to another while it faced its inevitable decay' (Bowler 1989: 10). Major evolutionist theorists of the times incorporated this scheme in their sociological models.

Tylor documented cases in which former societies had experienced degradation. For instance, rejecting the idea that the deserted cities of Copan, Palenque and the rest of Central America were the work of an extinct race, he proposed the 'descendants of the old builders are living there now', but brought to a sort of low European civilisation (Tylor 2005 [1865]: 181). Thus, his contribution was that real decline often took place when a rude but strong race overcame a cultivated but weak race (Tylor 2005 [1865]: 181). Tylor's theory for survival also proposed that when a society evolves, certain customs are retained regardless of being useless for the new social fabric (Tylor 2005 [1865]: 190), a idea that can be considered a further manifestation of allochronism.

Tylor, like many of his contemporaries, seemed to have maintained the principle of the unity of mankind. However, Spencer challenged this principle by incorporating the language of race: he



proposed that 'primitive races' were 'relics' of ancestral steps in the development of man that derived processes of recapitulation, degeneration, or arrested development, all which resulted from mixing different races (Stocking 1987: 228). These racial views helped to consolidate allocronism within the framework of biological evolution.

It is worth pointing out that the cyclical view of history raised both pessimistic and optimistic views of social evolution. While some Victorian forces expressed hope that science and progress itself would provide a stimulus capable of generating further progress, others expressed concern over the prospect that the human phase of development might have passed its peak and be heading towards inevitable decline (Bowler 1989: 196-197). In this sense, the past of the ancient civilisations could be interpreted as a warning about the future. Modern degenerate descendants of 'ancient civilisations' could be perceived as example of what the modern Western civilizing men could become. In other words, evolutionary cyclical views of history 'put time in the reverse gear: [hence] the past became a way to access an image of the future' (Eagleton 2000: 29).

Pessimist evolutionary thinking about the future was often based on views about Others' morality. For instance, some scholars proposed that Eastern excess and luxury had weakened the natural moral attitude of British settlers, a view that propelled caution against transporting Oriental excess, vices and immorality into British society (Singh 1996: 58). Such perspectives were formulated on the basis of the idea that India was intrinsically despotic, a trait that was associated with 'archaic societies', which were incorporated into a general meta-narrative of progress

According to Errington (1998: 12), the nineteenth century meta-narrative of progress promoted a view among Europeans in which the past was understood as a continuous multiple-step progression. In addition, the meta-narrative of progress superimposed new tripartite models of developments on the traditional scheme of history of ancient, medieval and modern periods. This operation is clear in the work of Morgan, who developed a tripartite division of savagery, barbarism and civilisation to understand the development of ancient societies around the world (Morgan 1877).

The meta-narrative of progress in society also implied certain qualifications on the notion of civilisation (Figure 1). For the purposes of this thesis the most important is the emphasis on writing, history, and agriculture as the lines that divided primitive from civilised societies (Errington 1998: 12). Furthermore, art, religion, philosophy and the formation of the state were conceived as the markers of the highest expression of civilisation (Errington 1998: 15). The meta-narrative of progress also created a further difference between archaic and modern civilisations: it was generally thought that Egyptian, Sumerian, Greek and Roman cultures had been under the sway of religion, governed by divine kingships and priesthoods –indeed the

components of a theocratic government—, which stressed the idea that barbarism, paganism and despotism were characteristic of the archaic civilisations, while the true religion (Christianity) was what defined modernity (Errington 1998: 15). This dichotomy created an axis of difference between the Classical civilisations and other archaic civilisations.

Other characteristics of the conceptualization of civilisation can be found by examining its own development, particularly in relation to the concept of ‘cultural complexity’, the second component of the notion of ‘ancient civilisation’.

### **3.2. THE CONCEPT OF ‘CIVILISATION’**

There is no standard or absolute definition of ‘civilisation’ either for archaeology, or for other social sciences. Indeed, it escapes from a stable or fixed meaning, for its understanding has developed through the years and there have been multiple assumptions about what it signifies (Mazlish 2004: xi). However, we can map its essential traits, by examining the history of its conceptualization, the formulation that was shaped by nineteenth century scholarly discourses and its implications in the socio-political context of this milieu. The mapping of the structural elements of the notion of civilisation follows some principles: the assumption that some essential traits become fixed through repetition, which stabilised meaning, but that there is also a growth and development of signification, which allowed the notion to be actualised according to the conceptual frameworks of the time. Following this approach, we can conclude that the notion of civilisation has historically entailed the following semantic operations: indexing, modelling, mirroring and, orientalisation.

#### **3.2.1 Indexing**

The general understanding of the notion of ‘civilisation’ that was articulated during the nineteenth century inherited some core elements that developed during previous centuries. We can trace this ancestry by taking into account etymological analysis, cultural studies and the realm of scholarly philosophical discourses of eighteenth-century Enlightenment. Following these analyses, it is possible to argue that the concepts of ‘culture’ and ‘civilisation’ have been intrinsically connected, although they have coexisted somewhat in tension. Both civilisation and culture have been connected with traits such as agriculture, development of language, foundation of cities, urban life, public manners, morality and ways of life (Eagleton 2000: 4-6; Waswo 1997: xi-4; Williams 1976: 76-82). Both terms have also acted as semantic counterparts of the notion of savagery and barbarism, which have been associated with lack of (or limitations on) of language (and thus writing), as well as with nomadic, non-agricultural, non-urban life (Mazlish 2004: 4) and particular acts of labour: pastoralism, hunting and gathering (Waswo 1997:

47). The idea of the savage has conformed to the paradigmatic image of the uncivilised 'Other', which has been associated with the idea of the foreign, naked and hairy human, and various types of physical and social anomalies, including monstrosity, paganism, polytheism and sexual depravity (Stenou 1998: 88). Thus the concepts of culture and civilisation entail a normative character, which invites 'normalisation' by means of the civilising process, a view that fitted in colonialist and imperialist agendas. In addition, the ideas of culture and civilisation have also implied superiority, particularly of the West over the Rest, which entails asymmetrical power-relationships of the former in relation to the latter (Elias 1994: 14; Mundimbe 1988: 1).

The Enlightenment and the introduction of the notion of progress in speculations about social development were critical for the academic configuration of both the concepts of civilisation and culture in numerous ways. Firstly, they turned into unifying concepts of socio-cultural thinking and became increasingly accepted in scholarly discourse (Kroeber & Kluckhohn 1952: 145). Although in these conditions both of the terms were initially employed in similar contexts, they eventually acquired specific meanings (Eagleton 2000; Gouldsblom 1992: 289). While civilisation was articulated to make universalistic and rather absolute claims, entailing both an evaluative and a comparative nature, the term culture acquired a relativistic meaning and became associated with the local level, particularly with nationalistic agendas, an understanding that was emphasized due to the influence of the Romantic Movement (Mazlish 2004: 3).

During the second half of the eighteenth century, social philosophers (e.g. Mirabeau and Kant in Mazlish 2004: 4) defined civilisation by reinforcing its previous links with the ideas of monotheism, the true religion (Christianity), morality, decency, the beaux-arts, agriculture, the foundation of cities and social order. Social historical/philosophical works of Turgot, Ferguson, Millar, Robertson, Condorcet and Volney related the term civilisation with certain processes, such as advancement in education, the development of laws, justice, industry, commerce, the growth of institutions, and material, economic, political and moral development, which all served to insert the notion of civilisation and made it meaningful in accordance with a progressive view of history (Stocking 1985a: 15, 1985b; Harris 2001: 29; Mazlish 2004: 140).

The nineteenth century witnessed a further step in the development of the notions of culture and civilisation, which finally turned into scientific categories that grew in comparative tension (Eagleton 2000). In this capacity, the word civilisation was then fully integrated into social evolutionistic discourse, which reinforced its qualitative character in relation to the concept of culture, occupying initially the top of the ladder in range of scale (Tylor 1958 [1871:1]) and eventually turning into its antonym (Eagleton 2000:9). In the course of the Victorian era, the concepts of culture and civilisation became fixed into social theoretical thinking, but still entailed diverse understandings (Mazlish 2004: 25). However, civilisation tended to mean a reflection of the recent British experience in terms of progress, which stressed its links with modernity, implied a framing into precepts of Western culture, and acquired an adjectival form

(Eagleton 2000:10; Stocking 1985a: 35). Some theorists viewed civilisation as an exclusivist trait of Western Culture, and even incorporated into racial discourse (Stocking 1985a). However, the many semantic traits that shaped the notion of civilisation during this era can better be inferred by considering its modelling in theoretical thinking.

As explained above, the second half of the nineteenth century witnessed a great revival in theoretical history (Trigger 1989: 100), which included the emergence of a series of scientific theoretical models which aimed to clarify not only the steps of progression towards civilisation, but to explain the processes and characteristics that defined each stage. These models are worthy of closer examination not only because they clearly constitute sophisticated scholarly attempts to define the notion of civilisation within the scientific framework of the times, but also because they reflected the manner in which the word civilisation (and to lesser degree that of culture) was shaped by the political agendas of the Victorian Era.

Examination of these models is based on a strictly historicist perspective, thus omitting those critiques that dwell on present-day polemical points, since as Stocking (1987: 142) has warned us, it can obscure historical understanding of the human sciences, as well as of the manner in which these contributed to the shaping of the notion of civilisation during the second half of the nineteenth century.

### **3.2.2. Modelling**

Three models of Victorian socio-anthropological thinking were developed by the most influential Anglo-Saxon theorists of the era: Morgan, Lubbock and Spencer. Examining these models is useful to understand the semantic traits of the notion of ‘civilisation’ within nineteenth-century scholarly discourse.

The first model of civilisation owes its authorship to L. Morgan. His *Ancient Society* (1877) attempted a grand synthesis of cultural evolution at the global scale by proposing that civilisation was gained by means of the gradual, progressive and accumulative achievement of cultural processes. According to this model, civilisation was achieved through the passing of a given society from the stages of savagery towards barbarism, by the changing of forms of labour: from gathering to fishing to hunting. During barbarism, societies developed pottery, domestication of animals, cultivation, employed adobe and stone architecture, technological achievements that allowed the rise of urbanism and metallurgy. Finally, civilisation was achieved through the development of phonetic alphabet, writing and the formation of nation-states: this stage had been attained only by the Roman and Greek cultures (Morgan 2000 [1877]: 3-13, 257-276) (see Table 2)

<b>Table 2</b> <b>Morgan's Scheme of Cultural Evolution</b>		
<b>Savagery</b>	Lower	Fruit and Nut Subsistence
	Middle	Fish Subsistence and Fire
	Upper	Bow and Arrow
<b>Barbarism</b>	Lower	Pottery
	Middle	Old World: Domestication of Animals (Shepherds) New World: Cultivation of Maize, adobe and stone architecture
	Upper	Iron Tools
<b>Civilisation</b>		Phonetic Alphabet Writing

Morgan's scheme proposed a mono-linear perspective of evolution, which was based on the premise of the uniformity of human experience. One of the most important contributions of this evolutionary sequence is its attempt to link and coordinate the developments attained at one stage with all of the rest. The overall effect of this was of a diachronic and synchronic system of unprecedented structural and chronological logic, which, in spite of its weaknesses and inadequacies (Harris 2001: 184-186; Fox 2000: xxiii-xxvii), created a coherent approach that helped to define the specific area of enquiry of classic anthropological thought: cultural evolution.

Morgan has been often regarded as a paradigmatic example of social materialism (Renfrew & Bahn 1996: 15). Indeed, technology was the dominant force of cultural change on his scheme. At times it even appears that isolated technological features were attributed unreasonable weight (Eriksen & Nielsen 2001:19): this is the case of the importance given to pottery. Equally, the emphasis on iron tools for Upper Barbarism 'was responsible for another great disaster: the assignment of the Aztec to the same ethnical period as the Iroquois': i.e. Middle Barbarism (Harris 2001: 185). However, Morgan was neither a materialist, nor an idealist, but a dualist (Harris 2001: 213). Whereas his scheme was materialistic in its approach to material culture, it took an idealist perspective for everything else. Not only intellectual and moral development was integrated in this model as a fundamental germ for the ideas that led to transformation of societies from one stage to another (Harris 2001: 213). Moreover, these ideas were grouped in eight fields, including subsistence, government, language, family relations, religion, architecture and property, which all had their own particular stages of evolution. These particular stages not only were linked amongst each other, but also stood in relation to the inventions and discoveries of each society. Therefore, Morgan's scheme implied an immediate connection amongst several disciplines, including comparative philology, sociology, anthropology and archaeology (Fox 2000: xxi).

During the following two decades after its publication, Morgan's dualist (materialist-idealist) model was complemented by the views of Lubbock and Tylor, who added the variable of religion to the social evolutionary theorising.

Lubbock's *The Origin of Civilisation* (1870) was dedicated to sketching the historical evolution of religious belief from the past to the present. It explored seven major social institutions –art, marriage, kinship, religion, morality, language and law– from their first manifestations in history towards their fullest flower in modern Europe. Although this work scarcely attempted to make a coordination of the religious sequence with the evolution of social structure, 'Atheism' was often associated with savagery (Harris 2001: 200), whereas civilisation with 'Monotheism'. Thus, 'Fetishism', 'Totemism', 'Shamanism' and 'Idolatry' could be associated to a middle-stage of progress: Barbarism. It is precisely in this stage in which Lubbock (1870: 5, 119) noted the only functional connection between religion and social structure, by arguing that Idolatry with its sacrifices, temples and gods represented by images (idols) led to the 'increasing power of chiefs and priests'.

Even though the influence of the *Origin of Civilisation* cannot be compared with the most famous work of Lubbock –*Prehistoric Times* (1865)–, both contributions serve to understand a major shift in the context of the developing socio-cultural debate during the Victorian times. Whereas the former work was still concerned with establishing the antiquity of humans to demonstrate the validity of evolutionism, the latter recreated the transformation of society with the characteristic emphases of the Classical socio-cultural evolutionary viewpoint, including the notion of fixed stages through which all human societies progress, the use of the comparative method, and the deeply ethnocentric bias, which made heavy value judgments on different societies, with Western Civilisation seen as the most valuable. Furthermore, according to Stocking (1987: 156), by 1870, Lubbock gave greater emphasis to the process of 'independent invention', and thus, the 'parallelism' of cultural development, although without using these terms. This served to support the idea that progress occurred at different rates amongst different cultures, an argument that was further systematised by E. Tylor.

Tylor's mentalistic view of the evolutionary process functioned according to parallel sequences (Tylor 1877: 1: 1), thus abandoning the uni-linear models proposed by many of his contemporaries, including Morgan and Lubbock. *Researches into the Early History of Mankind* (Tylor 1865: 1) studied 'the various ways in which man utters his thoughts, in gestures, words, pictures and writing' in order to develop a series of general laws regarding the evolution of a wide range of cultures from around the world. For instance, the progression of writing is traced from simpler to more complex modes, beginning with the pictorial format to the phonetic stage and to the alphabetic level, stages that are associated with the same stages of development followed by Morgan –savagery, barbarism and civilisation– (Tylor 2005 [1865]: 88). Taking into account data from a wide range of cultural variation, Tylor 2005 [1865]: 88) then concluded that

‘picture-writing is found among savage races’ –whose highest development can be identified among ancient Mexicans–, whereas ancient Egyptians and the Maya Nation of Yucatan had achieved the evolution towards phonetic writing. Furthermore, his *Researches* traced back the origins of alphabetic writing to the Phoenician, Hebrew, Greek and Roman cultures (Tylor 2005 [1865]: 102). It appears that Tylor (2005 [1865]: 1, 88-100) argued that the top of the ladder of the civilising process was not only associated with the emergence of monotheism and Christianity, but also with the development of alphabetic writing and historical recording processes.

In his most influential work –*Primitive Society* (1877)– Tylor proposed a rather flexible sequence for the evolution of religion, which begins with the emergence of lower ‘Animism’ in savagery from which there was a gradual movement towards Polytheism, a process that involved the removal of high gods from direct human appeal until the consolidation of ‘Monotheism’ of contemporary Christianity. He also innovated the understanding of civilisation by admitting decadence as one of its steps of development. His writings proposed that decadence could be the result of invasion and influence of foreign civilisations, a diffusionist perspective that he also accepted as valid for the progression of societies (Tylor 1877: 1: 178-180). For instance, he (1877: 1: 181) argued that ‘in Egypt, the extraordinary development of masonry, goldsmiths work, weaving and other arts which pitch of excellence thousands of years ago, have died out under the influence of foreign civilisation’, a processes that was somewhat likened to the extinction of the ‘unknown race’ of Copan and Palenque in Central America.

Harris (2001: 140) has called Tylor a racist. Indeed, the notion of race was employed in his scheme as a larger scale of ‘Otherness’ to mark differences in cultural terms. This is clear in one of the most famous declarations of *Primitive Culture*, which stated that ‘few would dispute that the following races are arranged rightly in order of culture: Australian, Tahitian, Aztec, Chinese, Italian’ (Tylor 1877: i: 27), thus implying a subtle hierarchy based on skin colour that proceeds from dark to light peoples. However, as Stocking (1987: 235) has rightly pointed out, this scheme involves a pervasive looseness in the usage of the categories of nation and race. Furthermore, Tylor (1877: 1: 7) proposed to ‘eliminate considerations of hereditary varieties or races of man, and to treat mankind as homogeneous in nature, though placed in different grades of civilisations’, a view that was altogether comparable with that of Spencer.

Spencer’s *Principles of Sociology* (1864) aimed to sketch the developmental sequences of all major branches of culture (including family, religious, governmental, and technological evolution), an exercise that led to the proposition that the social system as a whole moves from the military type to the industrial type. The details of this evolutionary scheme do not need to detain us here, since the major contribution of Spencer did not lie in the realm categorisation, but rather in the explanatory domain. Indeed, his evolutionary sequence followed the guiding principle that evolution implied a change from simpler to more complex forms, but it also offered a further

general theory that proposed that ‘progress’ was a crucial adaptation process, the very signification of his most influential phrase – ‘the survival of the fittest’ – (Spencer 1864: 44). This model further proposed that civilisation was not an artefact, but rather an intrinsic ‘part of nature’ (Harris 2001: 214), an argument that served to propose clear equations between the biological evolution of mankind and the cultural level of the individual. As result of this, Spencer’s evolutionary model was multi-linear: it merged progress with racial determinism.

Spencer was neither the first to associate social progression with the notion of race, and racism. Nor he was the only British evolutionist who contributed with scientific arguments to propagation of racial stereotypes. However, considering that Spencer’s work enjoyed great popularity during the second half of the nineteenth century, many associate his works not only with the principle of biological reductionism, but also with the language of race (Carneiro 1967: xxvi). Particularly, Harris (2001: 134-135) has noted the utility of Spencer’s position for the rationalization of imperialism, since the imagined bio-cultural specialities of the ‘inferior’ races served as justification for domination, exploitation, inferior treatment, and other practices familiar to the reality of the colonial system.

The above models have an element in common: they conceived civilisation as a comparative category. Indeed, one essential trait of the notion of ‘civilisation’ is that it worked as mirror image of the ‘Other’.

### 3.2.3. Mirroring

The nineteenth century saw an increasing connection between the notion of ‘civilisation’ and the language of *alterity*. Within this context, the notion of ‘civilisation’ functioned as an inverse mirror image of the idea of the ‘Other’: the *savage*, and particularly, the idea of the ‘primitive’ that crystallised in nineteenth-century Western thought (Kuper 1988). This means that the notion of ‘civilisation’ has played a central role in the conformation of the identity of Western society, in its differentiation in relation to ‘Other’ cultures, and for the articulation of unequal power-relationships of the former in respect to the latter, particularly in the context of colonialism and imperialism (Levin-Rojo 2001: 23-25; Mazlish 2004: 33-36).

Western systems of *alterity* are helpful to understand further traits of the notion of ‘civilisation’, since its structural traits can be inferred as current paradigmatic oppositions to the conformation of European internal or external ‘Others’ (Rapport & Overing 2000: 14). Particularly interesting was the low advancement of artistic creativity ascribed to (colonised) ‘Others’. Thus characterisation, which lies at the core of the dichotomy between Western Art and non-Western artefact (Vogel 1988: 11), explains why non-Western artistic productions were incorporated in Ethnographic or Natural History Museums (Mundimbe 1988: 4), (instead of



into Art museums), during most of the nineteenth century. The appropriation of aboriginal objects by Europeans also signified their incorporation into European value-systems. As part of this process, non-Western artefacts were symbolically transformed, not only into curiosities, tokens of victory and objectifications of false religion, but more importantly, as testimonies of the visiting, categorization and domination of remote places (Thomas 1991: 125-184).

The above categorisations of non-Western entities were articulated not only in a host of written and visual media –travel literature, graphic arts, photographs–, but also in the great variety of forms of displays that were produced in the 1800s. Clifford (1985) has particularly pointed out the symbiotic relationship that existed between the symbolic and the institutional powers of anthropological exhibitions. Pursuant to these views, a number of researchers have demonstrated that exhibiting ‘Other’ cultures was a potent mechanism for the presentation of the colonial project and the visualisation of the asymmetrical power relationships between the coloniser and the colonised (Cannizzo 1991; Coombes 1994, 1996; Barringer & Flynn 1997). For example, nineteenth-century ethnographic displays often articulated a metaphor of Western domination in which non-European objects were unmistakably presented as inferior to their European counterparts. Shows of non-Western peoples of this era also contributed to disseminate images of European superiority, particularly by means of the objectification of the living into controllable material culture (Kirshenblatt-Gimblett 1991; Coombes 1994, Ucko 2000). Similar colonialist attitudes commanded the narratives that lay behind anthropological displays of both material culture and human beings at World’s Fairs (Benedict 1983; Rydell 1984; Greenhalgh 1988; Hinsley 1991). Furthermore, these spectacles, as much as anthropological displays, often disseminated negative stereotypes of other cultures –especially of those located in the colonies of European Imperial powers–, which appeared as unequivocal statements under the banner of the authority of science. According to Durrans (1998), this positivist orientation of anthropological display endowed an image of detached objectivity that helped to legitimise its links with British colonialism.

Further contributions regarding the construction of epistemological and power-relationships imbued in the imperialist project have been tackled by analysing the practice of archaeology. Indeed, recent studies have shown that many colonialist regimes controlled archaeological research, which led to multiple and complex manifestations (Trigger 1980, 1984, 1985, 1989). Among these was the manipulation of archaeological interpretations, which deny colonised societies any dignified pre-colonial past, exclude locals from their history, negate indigenous settlement in occupied areas, or obscure the cultural complexity of ancient societies (e.g. Galarke 1973, Gawe & Meli 1994).

Taking the above views into consideration, it is possible to argue that Western systems of alterity implicitly deny the formulation of an ancient civilisation within non-European settings, since the idea of the ‘Other’ embraced a double negation: that of its past and that of its cultural

complexity. However, it is well documented that in spite of growing racism and romantic Hellenism, nineteenth-century Europeans were able to recognise, and even admired, the complexity of ancient Egyptian, Chinese (Bernal 1987: 189), Indian (Singh 1996: 66), and Assyrian cultures (Bohrer 1998). Therefore, understanding the formulation of the notion of ‘ancient civilisation’ within the ideological scope of nineteenth-century Western thinking, we need to examine a specific cultural process here called *Orientalisation*.

### 3.2.4. Orientalisation

According to Said (1978: 43, 114-196), during the last three centuries the works of Orientalists have assisted in the construction of stereotypical images of two ‘imaginary communities’ (Anderson 1983): the European that has been perceived as rational, developed, humane, superior, authentic, active creative, and masculine, and the Oriental that has been seen as irrational, aberrant, backward, crude, despotic, barbaric, weak, feminine, sexually corrupt and exotic (Said 1978: 114-196; Kabbani 1994; McClintock 1995). This ontological norm constitute a discourse that has historically contributed to the construction of a ‘hegemonic system’ designed, consciously or unconsciously, to dominate, restructure and have authority over the Orient (Said 1978: 205; Macfie 2002: 4).

One of the discursive practices of *Orientalism* was the formulation of a long-gone, dead, neglected, exotic, but golden, ‘Classical Orient’, which was bound by the realms of antiquity, and therefore, distanced and detached from its present (Said 1978: 122-148; Rashed 1980: 1-11; Jeffreys 2003b: 4). This ‘Classical Orient’, which was perceived as culturally superior to its present, was to be revived by the reconstruction of its languages and the unearthing of its monuments by Western scholarship (Said 1978: 125). In fact, these epistemological processes meant that Europeans could symbolically both dispossess locals of their claims to their own past civilisation and possess it to become the preserve of Western culture and Western museums (Hassan 2003: 21).

*Orientalism* has been widely discussed within humanities and social sciences. However, it has been less overtly prominent as an issue in the specific field of archaeology. Nonetheless, recent studies have begun to incorporate it to analyse the history of archaeological practice in Egypt through the eyes of Postcolonial theory (i.e. Jeffreys 2003a; Mazlish 2004; Moser 2006). As a result of this exercise, it has been convincingly shown that Bonaparte’s expedition to Egypt initiated the conquering of ‘Ancient Egypt, and its subsequent possession, by European scholarship’ (Mazlish 2004: 32). Furthermore, it has been possible to expose that multiple mechanisms were at play in this process. Most tangible was the vast collecting of Egyptian antiquities by Western armies, travellers, scholars and diplomats: an enterprise that during the nineteenth century not only acquired monumental dimensions, but also became a major

competition between the imperial powers of the times. Furthermore, it has been argued that the further translation of these cultural items to Western locales –museums, public spaces and private collections– along with the information and the visual representations gathered in surveys, published in books, and stored in archives, effectively meant that Ancient Egypt became part of Western civilisation’s holdings (Cf. Bierbrier 2003; Hassan 2003; Jeffreys 2003a, 2003b; Thompson 2003).

Orientalist discourse proposed a series of stereotypical images about the *Good Orient* (Said 1978: 122-148; Rashed 1980: 1-11), which were based on its exoticism, its bizarre and static nature, its intrinsic decadence, its corruption and its weakness (Singh 1992, 1996). Furthermore the Good Orient was characterised by its monumental grandeur and its ferocity, while its cultural productions were perceived as curiosities, exotic ‘colossal monstrosities’ (Mitchell 1998: 5; Moser 2006: 28) or curious artefacts, which artistic appreciation was subjected to scepticism, ambiguity and/or debate. These categorizations were set in contraposition to Greek culture and its Classical art, thus playing the role of marker both of difference and, specifically, of inferiority of the East in relation to West. The introduction of the concept of *despotism* (Bahrani 1998) –a form of government defined by arbitrary rule and therefore forceful command– (Cohn 1992: 62) stressed this relationship of power. Despotism became a key, but rather ambiguous element for the configuration of the ‘Classical Orient’, which linked it with the notions of barbarism –a term that usually refers to societies with unwritten laws and bizarre customs– and paganism –defined as an alternative history of error and folly perpetrated by Satan (Singh 1992: 9, 28, 67; Shelton 1994: 201). Furthermore, despotism was also set up in contrast to the Western democratic, free and entrepreneur societies (Cohn 1992: 62). An alternative, or complementary Orientalising interpretation of the glorious ‘Ancient Orient’ involved intrinsic ties with specific (aberrant) religious practices, including sacrifice and auto-mutilation (Inden 1990; Singh 1992: 9, 28, 67).

*Orientalism* also linked the idea of the ‘Good Orient’ with the past, the present and the future. In the former instance, it became associated with the trope of origins, which served to dispossess the Orientals of their past, either by claiming that the genesis of civilisation lay somewhere else or by asserting that ancient civilisations were the cradle of Western culture (Said 1978; Rashed 1980). The association of the notion of ‘civilisation’ with present times was construed by means of the idea of the *decay, downfall, dead and extinction* of the Good Orient and its current corrupted state (Singh 1996, *my emphasis*). By these means, the East was conceived of as the source and potential transmitter of moral corruption, a view that entailed a threat and a pervasive fear regarding the future of the West (Mitchell 1998).

According to Diaz-Andreu (2007: 16), interest in the past during the nineteenth century was selective: the first concern was that of civilisation, the understanding of its manifestations and the reasons for its *eventual downfall (my emphasis)*. Interestingly enough, extinction and catastrophe

have been also identified as key elements for the popular appeal for dinosaurs from 1800s onwards. Furthermore, the notion of the 'dinosaur' shared a series of common epistemological features with Oriental ancient civilisations, including monstrosity, ferocity and monumentality (Cf. Mitchell 1998: 8-12). Hence, according to Mitchell (1998: 98) the dinosaur fitted 'perfectly into the grotesque melange of ancient and modern, exotic and familiar objects' displayed at the 1855 Crystal Palace

Exhibition. An engraving published in 1855 by *The Punch* about this exhibit

Figure 9. The Effects of a Hearty Dinner after Visiting the Antediluvian Department at the Crystal Place  
(From Mitchell 1998: 99)

confirms the association between the dinosaur, the primitive, and the ancient civilisations (represented by the Pharaonic Egypt) (Figure 9). Moreover, this image sets all these constructions as menacing forces for the peaceful dreaming of Britons.

Along with the construction of the 'Good and Golden Orient', *Orientalism* configured two main discursive agents. On the one hand, there was the construction of the 'modern local inhabitants', the present Orientals, as degenerate remnants of a lost high culture or poor imitators of their ancestors (Nivarjana 1992). A series of characteristics were linked to these figures: they were nameless, irrational and unfit to analyse their own culture due to their lack of curiosity and intellect (Mitchell 1988: 5). They were also conceived of as forming a homogenous and hopeless populace that was unable to carry any task related to the investigation or reanimation of their past (Said 1978: 122-78). Moreover, the present Orientals were often portrayed as unreliable translators of their texts and blamed for having buried their past in an obscurity of fables (Nivarjana 1992). All these and other traits, such as the Oriental opacity and barbarism, were the basis to assert their need for reform and civilisation.

In contraposition, *Orientalism* construed the figure of the 'Western hero' who rescued and reanimated the Orient from its own obscurity, alienation, strangeness and death (Said 1978: 121). The 'Western hero' was both considered as a 'seeing man' (Pratt 1992: 7) of an unoccupied land ready for possession, as well as regarded as the very holder of 'veracity', due to its capacity of eye witness and the privilege of his 'act of seeing as a mode of immediate access to experience' (Singh 1996: 21). All these elements, in conjunction with tropes of discovery, adventure, wonder, marvel, danger and hazard characterised the narrative of the Western hero (Singh 1996, Spurr 1993) and serve to justify his claim to authority as the true speaker,

interpreter, translator and mediator of the ancient golden Orient. The images of the 'Modern oriental' and the 'Western hero' thus stayed in clear opposition to each other, representing the realities of the inferiority of present East and the superiority of the imperial West.

Recent scholarship has suggested that *Orientalism* was not only tied to the geographical location that is implicit in its name. Far-away places, such as Mexico, have been studied too, although in a rather limited fashion, through the eyes of Orientalist theorising. Paradigmatic examples of this are the studies of Edison (1999) and Aguirre (2005), which on the basis of the notion of 'informal empire' have analyzed French and British attitudes in relation to the development of Mexican and Central American archaeology during the nineteenth century. Both authors have identified imperialistic attitudes in archaeological literature, the development of archaeological expeditions and in the collecting of Pre-Columbian antiquities. Recent literature on nineteenth-century British displays of Mesoamerican antiquities (Medina González 1998, 2000; Aguirre 2005) has also uncovered imperialistic agendas and attitudes within the exhibitions' narratives. My work (Medina González 2003) has specifically contributed to the analysis of the manner in which Aztec Culture was represented in comparison with the imperialistic operations that were articulated in regard to the archaeological discovery of Egypt, during the Napoleonic Intervention and afterwards.

### 3.3 CONCLUSIONS

This chapter contributes to the understanding of the history of archaeology by examining the notion of 'ancient civilisation'. Following the principles of Semantic Research, I have examined independent sources of data to trace the development of concepts of 'ancient' and 'civilisation'. As a result, it is possible to unite the characteristic traits of these concepts in a structural graphic model, which is summarised in Table 3. This table presents each of these concepts and their essential units of signification grouped according to acts of 'timing' and of 'complexity'.

This model constitutes the S-Code of the notion of 'ancient civilisation' that according to the methodology presented in Chapter 2, will be tested against factual evidence during the following chapters. The factual evidence is formed by a body of exhibitions produced in the nineteenth century both in the United Kingdom and the United States, which focused on the subject of some Mesoamerican cultures. For analytical purposes, these exhibits have been divided according their type of contents in three display traditions: exhibitions of material culture, displays of monuments, and shows of people, categories that are not exclusive of each other, but are helpful to analyse different display modes of representation. Each of these traditions is firstly examined by looking at its historical background and then by analysing case studies, which are studied following the methodology proposed in Chapter 2.

<div>Table 3</div> <div>Initial S-Code of the Notion of ‘Ancient Civilisation’</div>					
Acts of Timing				Acts Of Complexity	
P E R I O D I S A T I O N	Sharply distinctive époques			Problematic connection with the notion of culture	I N D E X I N G
	Ancient-middle- Modern			Traits: Agriculture, Language, Cities, Urban Life, Public Manners, Morality, Christianity	
	Separated by ruptures			Universalistic claims	
	Antiquity=paganism			Contraposition with ideas of savage and barbarism (uncivilised others)= pastoralism, hunting, gathering, foreign, physical and moral abnormalities, polytheism, sexual depravation, invites civilising process.	
	Antiquity= Luminescent époque, separated by dark age from modernity= revival			Enlightenment: Unifying concept of socio-cultural thinking: Universalistic, Evaluative and Comparative (vs. Culture: relative, local)	
	Remote= Chronology= Very old			Traits: Monotheism, Agriculture, Beaux arts, Cities, Social Order, Laws, Industry, Commerce, Political, Material and Moral progression	
	Remote= Geographical= Far away, Foreign			Evolutionism: Scientific Category Qualitative character, Top of the ladder of culture Adjectival forms: Determination based on socio-cultural traits	M O D E L L I N G
	Comparison and Association with Modernity			Morgan’s Scheme: Savagery, Barbarism and civilisation. Civilisation: Phonetic Writing, Urbanism, Metallurgy, Formation of Nation States	
	Revival=acts of exploration, unearthing monuments, resurrecting antiquity			Lubbock’s scheme: Atheism, Idolatry (sacrifices) and Monotheism equated with Savagery, Barbarism and civilisation Civilisation: Historical Recording Tylor’s scheme: Cyclical view of Evolutionism Spencer’s scheme: Introduction of language of race.	
	Cyclical View of History= Chain of Being, Tension between progressive and degenerative views				M I R R O W I N G
E X T E N S I O N	Major Time Length: 1860s onwards: introduction to Prehistory= new marker of the beginning of Antiquity End of 1800s: 3000 years Antiquity= Writing Major Geographical Extension: Inclusion Old World, New World Re-signification: periodisation depends on cultural traits and acts of timing	I   E	L   I   S	Alterity: civilisation= inverted image of Savagery, Barbarism, and the idea of the ‘Primitive’ Civilisation: Self image of the West, pointer of difference with Others (e.g. Art vs. Artefact), marker of superiority of West, articulator of power-relationships: imperialism, colonialism Paradox: No ancient civilisation within non-European settings, since Other embraced a double negation: that of its past and that of its cultural complexity. Nineteenth-century Europeans were able to recognise, and even admired, the complexity of ancient Egyptian, Chinese), Indian, and Assyrian cultures.	
T R A N S F O R M A T I O N	Degeneration: Ruins of Antiquity: by gone and once in a high state of development Anxiety about the Future Progression: Interest in meaning Early Evolutionism: Dialectical relationship between the ideas of the primitive and civilisation New periodisation: Savagery, Barbarism and civilisation Late Evolutionism: Cyclical model: Progression and decadence of cultural complexity	N   T	A   T   I   O   N	Golden Past Orient: Classical, bounded to antiquity, dead, long-gone, remote, neglected, exotic, distanced and detached from its present, culturally superior to its present, in need of reanimation by the reconstruction of languages by the unearthing of monuments and other acts performed by Western scholarship, Bizarre, Static, intrinsically decadent, corrupted, weak, monumental, Cultural productions= curiosities, colossal monstrosities, curious artefacts, artistic appreciation subjected to scepticism, ambiguity or debate, Despotic (arbitrary rule by violence), Barbaric ( unwritten laws and bizarre customs), Religious (Heathenism, Paganism, Idolatry, Sacrifices, auto-destruction) Theocratic government, Origins (genesis somewhere or cradle of Western civilisation). Future (Decay, Corruption), Threat (source and transmitter of moral corruption).	O R I E N T A L I S A T I O N
M A P P I N G	Evolutionism: allochronism Others: Primitives, Uncivilised, Past of The West West appropriating the Past of Others: Classical Civilisations Cyclical View of History: Each Civilisation making its contribution Warning to the future Meta-narrative of Progress: Archaic civilisations: writing, art, religion, despotic. Dichotomy with Modernity: Ancient Pagan Religion, Barbarian, Theocratic or Despotic Government, vs. Modern Science/True religion			Modern Locals: New Interlopers, remains of lost high-culture, poor imitators of their ancestors, nameless, homogenous and hopeless, irrational, unfit to analyse their own culture, unreliable translators of their texts, lack of curiosity and intellect, incapable of seeing, incapable of reanimating their past Barbaric, in need of civilisation  Western Hero: Male, rescuer and re-animator of the Golden age, ‘seeing man’ of an unoccupied land ready for possession, holder of veracity, authority as speaker and eye-witness, discovery, adventure, wonder, marvel, danger, hazards, true interpreter, translator and mediator of the Golden past.	

## CHAPTER 4

### Exhibiting Objects

This chapter focuses on the ways in which Mesoamerican artefacts were exhibited in the United Kingdom and the United States of America from the 1820s to 1870s, by examining issues of display production, representation and interpretation. This analysis serves to examine whether or not the displays articulated, or at least, approximated the structural elements of the notion of ‘ancient civilisation’ identified in Chapter 3.

Five displays are analysed in chronological order: Bullock’s *Ancient Mexico* (1824-1825); Young’s Exhibition of Mexican Antiquities (1855); Christy’s private exhibit (1862), the display of Mesoamerican collections at the British Museum (1828-1870); and, in a rather limited fashion, the exhibition of Pre-Columbian artefacts in diverse settings in the United States (1820-1870) from which we have but scarce information that cannot be studied in a systematic way.

These exhibits can almost be considered the origins of the British and American experiences at the display of Pre-Columbian objects. So far, no records have been found regarding the presence of Mesoamerican collections in the lands that, from the late eighteenth century onwards, became –or were incorporated into– the United States. Furthermore, in comparison with Continental Europe, it appears that Pre-Columbian artefacts were rarely collected and displayed in the United Kingdom before the nineteenth century (Heikamp 1972, 1976; Schlosser 1978; Feest 1985, 1993; Bray 1993; Honour 1975; Schepelern 1985; Scheicher 1985; Laurenci-Minelli 1985; Olmi 1985; Aimi 1985; Hooper-Greenhill 1992; Findlen 1994; Pomian 1990; Vanderbroeck 1992; King 1994). Documentation about these instances is scarce. However, it deserves consideration since it exposes some characteristics of the culture of collecting and displaying Mesoamerican objects in British display-spaces from the sixteenth century to the eighteenth century.

#### 4.1. BACKGROUND

The earliest evidence regarding the assembling of Mesoamerican material culture in Britain can be traced back to the sixteenth century. From this period and until the late-eighteenth century, British scholars and institutions collected Pre-Columbian artefacts for different purposes, including display. A narrative of this history is presented in the Appendix 1 of this thesis. However, for the purposes of this chapter, it seems appropriate to summarise a series of characteristic traits of this particular collecting/displaying culture:

It has been estimated that thousands of Native American objects were brought to Europe from the 1500s to the 1700s (Heikamp 1976: 240; Feest 1993: 3). It is difficult to ascertain how many of them were of Mesoamerican origin (see Feest 1985). However, a very limited number of these finally arrived in Britain. In this sense, sixteenth- seventeenth-, and eighteenth- century British collecting of Pre-Columbian material was characterised by its scarcity. The reasons for this have not been clearly established yet. However, a major determinant force was a Spanish policy that almost banned the access of non-Spanish visitors to Hispanic colonies (Bernal 1980: 291). Indeed, none of the objects collected in Britain had proceeded from direct collecting: that is acquisition from its original source (Mesoamerica). In addition, it seems that the collecting of Pre-Columbian items *in situ* was not always in the interest of British travellers. For example, there is no evidence indicating that Thomas Gage had collected Mesoamerican antiquities during his 1625 Mexican voyage. Furthermore, his report stated that while in Mexico he had smashed an idol (Heikamp 1976: 240; Feest 1993: 3). Thus, British collecting of Mesoamerican artefacts before the 1800s mainly derived from previous European collections, which mean that acquisition was rather determined by economic forces derived from market demand.

From the sixteenth to the eighteenth centuries, British collecting of Mesoamerican material culture was erratic. Most of the acquisitions derived from indirect or informal routes that relied on a network of personal, political, or professional relationships. A small number of secondary collecting processes were in operation. Purchase from European sources seems to have been a common procedure for initial acquisitions by British collectors, all of them members of the nobility, who were responsible for the relocation of the items in the United Kingdom. Through time, objects changed hands, mainly due to the deaths of their owners. This meant that Pre-Columbian artefacts could have belonged to a number of private collections before the late-seventeenth century, when most of them were bequeathed to scholarly and educational institutions. The British Museum inherited most of the artefacts, whereas a number of the Mexican Codices were finally incorporated in the Bodleian Library at Oxford. This trend in the destiny of Mesoamerican collections was common across Europe (see Feest 1985, 1993).

Little information is available regarding the practices of displaying Mesoamerican artefacts in Britain before the nineteenth century. However, the cases examined in Appendix 1 suggest nine significant characteristics:

First, the display of Mesoamerican materials mainly occurred in four display-spaces: private cabinets, libraries, scholarly institutions and, later museums. With the exception of the latter, it appears that the exhibit took place to very limited audiences, mainly members of the aristocracy and scholarly circles. Unfortunately, no information has been found yet regarding the response to such displays.



Second, there is no evidence suggesting that the exhibits incorporated much display technology. However, displays were not simple ‘presentations’ (*contra* Mason 1998: 2) since a number of representational frameworks were in operation.

Third, exhibits were limited to a few or a single item. There was no interest in displaying Mesoamerican objects as part of groups or series. This might have resulted from the scarcity of collections in Britain. However, by choosing to present objects in isolation, displays responded to a rather common framework of representation: ‘cabinets of curiosities’, settings that generally put emphasis on the uniqueness and rarity of the objects exhibited, which coincided ‘with a period in which science was more preoccupied by accidents than by laws’ (Ginzburg 1990: 96-125)

Fourth, there is no evidence suggesting that Mesoamerican material was ever represented as ‘ancient’ by British exhibits. Mesoamerican objects were not incorporated within temporal representational frameworks at all, for there was neither labelling nor categorisations that asserted their dating or age. This is clearly shown by Sloane’s catalogue, which, with the exception of the pendant mistakenly described as Egyptian, did not group Pre-Columbian artefacts within the group ‘antiquities’.

Fifth, it seems that from the eighteenth century onwards, British displays began to associate Mesoamerican artefacts with collections from non-Western locales. Indeed, Sloane’s catalogue integrated most of the Pre-Columbian artefacts among the ‘Miscellanea’, a section composed by material recently acquired in Asia, Africa, North America, the South Seas and the West Indies. Such an association persisted when the collection was acquired by the British Museum. As the Appendix I shows, the 1762 British Museum official guide asserted that Pre-Columbian sculpture was on display in the gallery of ‘Artificial Curiosities’ (King 1994: 231), a category that not only derived from contemporary European processes of appropriation of indigenous things (Thomas 1991: 125-137), but that also served to denote their (man-made) nature, origin and valuation within Western culture. Effectively, as Thomas (1991: 136-138) has argued, ‘the artefacts of non-Western peoples were known over a long period as “curiosities”’, a notion that within the literature of famous late-eighteenth century voyages expressed ‘an attribute of things to be noticed’. Considering that the term curiosity was also often employed ‘to express interest in it without passing an aesthetic judgement’ (Smith 1985: 123), it is not a surprise that 1700s display catalogues expressed a general lack of interest, if not disdain, regarding the artistic merit of Mesoamerican objects.

Sixth, the 1700s signals the beginning of an important framework for the representation of Mesoamerican material culture in British displays. It is widely acknowledged that from this moment onwards, some relevant contributions to Mexican archaeology (Siguenza 1684; Gemelli [1708] 2002) not only compared, but also associated the development of ancient Mexico with

Egyptian Antiquity (in Keen 1984: 203, 221). Furthermore, it has been argued that these ideas affected seventeenth-century visual representations of Mexican deities, whose renderings appear Egyptian to us (Heikamp 1976: 467). Evidence of this enduring connection can be also traced to a number of processes: the categorisation of Mexican Codices within the Bodleian Library, the misleading ascription of the Aztec pendant to an Egyptian origin in Sloane's catalogue, and finally, the 1762 printed guide of the British Museum, which indicates the supposed similarity between American and Egyptian figurines (BMG 1762: 34-35). Keen (1984: 221) has considered these categorisations as early manifestations of diffusionist models. However, display-representations never elaborated narratives about cultural dissemination. For this reasons, cultural associations might have originated in the multiple theories of descent that, in the course of the 1700s were put forward within the scholarly disputes over the ancestors of the Amerindians (Ryan 1981: 533).

Seven, sixteenth-, seventeenth-, and eighteenth- century British displays did not directly link Mesoamerica artefacts to a particular cultural group –namely the Aztecs, Toltecs, Mayas, etc.–. Rather, the relationship between the artefact and its (Pre-Columbian) origin was articulated through indirect linkage by two mechanisms of labelling. One of these consisted of associating the object with the famous historical figure, for instance Moctezuma: 'Moctezuma's Cup'. This mechanism was not exclusive to seventeenth-century British displays. An Italian catalogue around 1600s recorded a Brazilian object called 'Moctezuma's Mantle' (Feest 1993: 3). Another strategy consisted of assigning a locative term –Indian–, as in the case of Sloane's 'Indian hatchet'. This denomination served to refer to the Indies, the name that Columbus originally had given to the New World. It is noteworthy that use of the term 'Indian' persisted long after the sixteenth century, when the Americas were recognised as an independent continent. Proof of this was (and still is) the general denomination employed to refer to the original inhabitants of the New World and its descendants: the (American) Indians.

Eight, before the 1800s, British exhibitions did not associate Pre-Columbian antiquities with specific geographic locations, namely Mexico or Central America. In fact, the locative term 'Indian' seems to express the general disregard of the exhibits regarding the geographical specificity of the origin of the objects. According to Mason (1998: 24), from the sixteenth century onwards, Europeans used the term 'Indies' –and its derivations 'Indians'– to refer indiscriminately both to Asia and America. Visual images of those times showed that there was 'such a great degree of inter-penetrability between Asiatic and American iconography that, in many cases, we are faced with a construct that cannot be pinned down to a specific continent at all' (Mason 1998: 24). Indeed, Feest (1993: 3) has long recognised that many seventeenth-century catalogues ascribed American artefacts to an Asian origin. However, until now none have noticed that the diffuse American-Asian construct actually influenced the categorisation of Pre-Columbian material in Britain during the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. This can be

easily recognised in the ascription of provenance. Dee's speculum was for a long time thought to be Chinese, an origin that was also ascribed to other Mesoamerican objects and Pre-Columbian Codices housed in the seventeenth-century European cabinets of curiosities (Appendix 1; Feest 1993: 3).

Nine, the lack of interest regarding ethnographic and geographic precision in sixteenth-, seventeenth-, and eighteenth- century British displays of Mesoamerica suggests that a major frame of representation was derived from 'exoticism'. The 'exotic' has been recently defined as a construct produced by a process of de-contextualization and re-contextualisation of objects, which is rather the opposite of Edward Said's *Orientalism* since it 'tends to serve imaginative rather than concretely political terms' (Mason 1998: 1). According to Mason (1998: 1), under the frame of exoticism, 'it is not the 'original' geographic or cultural contexts which are valued but the suitability of the objects in question to acquire new meanings in a new context'. However, by the seventeenth century, British displays also represented Mesoamerican artefacts within another representational framework: heathenism, a term that refer to the non-Christian world. This can be clearly perceived by analysing the manner in which the British Museum exhibited Mesoamerican sculptures during 1762. Indeed, the written guide of that year stated that the Department of Artificial Curiosities exhibited 'American *idols*' from Peru and Mexico that had been originally 'placed in high-ways to be ready for the *adoration* of passengers' (BM 1762: 34-35). Such a description not only clearly established the original sacred function of the artefacts, but also situated them within a particular religious category: idolatry. Idolatry is a notion with variable meanings. Although there is no Biblical section that clearly defines it, many verses refer to it, defining it as the 'worship of idols', as the 'worship of polytheist gods by the use of idols' and, even as 'the use of idols for the worship of God' (Ferm 1945: 356; Bowler 2006: 299). Whatever its signification, Western Christianity has historically perceived idolatry as against the Law of God and even associated it with demonic devotion (Bromiley 1982: 794; Poupard 1987: 795). Ryan (1981: 526-529) has argued that Europe has an easily adjustable category –the 'pagan'– within which to categorise the inhabitants of new worlds. Standard compendiums of mythology of the Baroque period 'all classified classical, Asian and American customs under the rubric "pagan"', a notion that 'provided the basis for a comparative classification of the material culture of these regions' (Shelton 1994: 201). Moreover, Shelton (1994: 202-203) has convincingly shown that the incorporation of American artefacts into European sixteenth and seventeenth- century cabinets of curiosity was aided by a theological discourse 'that had as its objective the establishment and legitimation of paganism as a category'. There is no evidence indicating that the term paganism was ever employed within the context of contemporary practices of collecting and displaying Mesoamerican objects in Britain; however, there is a long-standing connection between the notions of idolatry and paganism.

To sum up, Mason (1998: 2) has suggested that, as fragmentary as they were, collections of items of the New World constituted partial glimpses that ‘formed a re-creation of the American continent by the potentially misleading totalisation from a part to whole, which is generally known as synecdoche’. On the basis of this argument, he (1998: 2) has further proposed that sixteenth-, seventeenth- and eighteenth- century European collections of American artefacts constituted ‘representations of America’ in their own right. The present study of contemporary pre-1800 British practices of collecting and displaying Pre-Columbian artefacts contradicts this view since it demonstrates that European filters did make an impact in the interpretation of artefacts (Massing 1991: 535). In fact, it appears that artefact categorisation and display representation employed a wide range of interpretative frameworks derived from Western aesthetic and religious categories. Therefore, Mesoamerican artefacts did not ‘reproduce the American reality itself’ (*contra* Mason 1998: 2), but rather ‘stood for an aspect of [such] reality’ (Gidley 1992: 1).

The present study also shows that the ‘exotic’ was not the only framework for the representation of Pre-Columbian artefacts in Europe (*contra* Mason 1998). Rather, representational frameworks were highly variable, since displays articulated religious and aesthetic categorisations. Indeed, there is still space for investigating whether contemporary exhibits from Continental Europe shared these representational frameworks. However, there does not seem to be a single instance indicating that the notion of ‘ancient civilisation’ was ever articulated for the categorisation and/or the exhibition of Pre-Columbian objects in Britain from the sixteenth- to the eighteenth century. In fact, the following sections will show that such an operation occurred in the nineteenth century.

#### **4.3. FIRST ‘GEORGIAN’ AZTECS IN LONDON: WILLIAM BILLOCK’S *ANCIENT MEXICO* (1824-1825)**

On April 8<sup>th</sup> 1824, the famous and experienced naturalist, collector and showman William Bullock (ca 1770-1849, for a biography see Medina-González 1998: Annex 2; Costeloe 2008) inaugurated *Ancient Mexico* (hereafter *AM*) in the Egyptian Hall, London (TMN 1824a: 2). This was the first systematic exhibition of Pre-Columbian Mexican past objects –particularly Aztec– worldwide. Simultaneously, an exhibition entitled *Modern Mexico* (*MM*) was opened in an adjoining room within the same premises. A year later, both exhibitions were united in a single display called *Ancient and Modern Mexico* (hereafter *AMM*).

The opening of these multi-experience spectacles (Medina-González 2000: 306) coincided with critical historical circumstances on both sides of the Atlantic, which influenced the exhibit’s production, as the following section will show.

#### 4.2.1. Production

The origin of Bullock's collection of Mexican Antiquities can be traced back to his 1823 venture to Mexico. Bullock's travel narrative –*Six Months of Residence*– first published in London in 1824, as much as the written guides for the exhibits, provide valuable information about his collecting activities in Mexico, as well as about the historical circumstances in which these took place (Bullock 1824a, 1824b, 1824c).

Bullock acquired a large number and a wide range of Pre-Columbian artefacts from a large variety of places and through different processes. For analytical purposes, we can distinguish five different groups. Table 4 sums up their characteristics, mentioning their place of origin and form of acquisition.

<p><b>Table 4</b> <b>General Contents of <i>Ancient Mexico</i></b></p>	
Type and Description	Place of Origin/Form of Acquisition
Nine Aztec sculptures made of volcanic stone that represented 'a female figure', 'the bust of a female' a 'woman with drapery in the back [...] named as the Aztec Princess', a Mexican Eagle, a bust of a priest, an idol in the form 'of a crocodile', an owl, a 'recumbent human figure' and, 'the figure of the sun' (Bullock 1824b: 39). (Figure 10)	Bullock's travel narrative gives no information about the places from which these items were seized. However, it seems these artefacts were obtained by purchase (Bullock 1824a: 334).
A group of alabaster and ceramic vessels, to an obsidian mirror, to a series of serpents' heads, and, to a 'Temple' (Bullock 1824b: 46).	
Small statues, knives of obsidian, ornaments, figures of terracotta and fragments of earthenware. (Bullock 1824b: 47)	Bullock obtained them in the field while visiting the archaeological sites Tezocstinfo and Teotihuacan, nearby Mexico City (Bullock 1824b: 47).
A model of the Pyramid of Teotihuacan and a series of cast moulds of Aztec monumental sculpture. Since these can be defined as reproductions of monuments, their production, representation and interpretation will be examined in Chapter 5.	Bullock (1824a: 330-331; 1824b: 30, 43) produced after their location at various spots in Mexico City.
Visual images: Apart from making reproductions of the collection of antiquities and engravings of Pre-Columbian monuments produced during the early nineteenth century antiquarian expeditions of G. Dupaix and L. Castañeda (for their history Bernal 1980: 93-102; Evans 2004: 22-34) Bullock acquired a series of copies of oil paintings representing a series of historical figures and events from the time of the Spanish Conquest of Mexico: a group-portrait of the 'Kings of Mexico, Cortes and other Indigenous Authorities'; a depiction of 'Meeting of Cortes with Moctezuma', an image of the 'destruction of an idol, which was replaced with a Virgin by Cortes', whose authorship and origin is unknown.	Copied from collections located at the Palacio de Minería and other governmental buildings off Mexico City.
Unique collection of at least seventeen indigenous codices –both originals and copies– that had presumably belonged to L. Boturini's <i>Museo Indiano</i> (Graham 1993: 49-45; Bernal 1980: 49-52, 57-59; Bullock 1824a: 329).	Bullock (1824a: 329) managed to acquire these documents by loan so that he could make copies in England.

Taking the extension and variety of sources of Bullock's collection into consideration, we can recognise that the timing of his Mexican venture appears more than appropriate for the development of his antiquarian activities. This idea is further supported by additional historical evidence.

In the aftermath of its Independence, Mexico was struggling for international recognition. In 1822, Spain had disowned the agreement of Independence of this country; therefore the Mexican government had turned to England, France and other Western countries for support (Vazquez 1976: 3). Furthermore, after years of isolation due to Spanish protectionist policies, Mexico officially opened up its frontiers to foreign visitors and their particular agencies. This process overlapped with the rise of northern European political and economic expansionism, which runs parallel to the explosion of Western missions devoted to the study of geography, natural history, ethnology and archaeology in many parts of the world, including Mexico (Ortega y Medina 1987: 3; Trigger 1989: 69; Estrada Gerlero 1996: 69; Jimenez Cordinach 1996: 42-43).

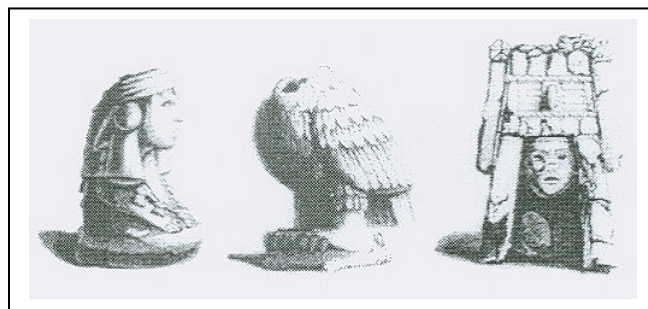


Figure 10. Some Mesoamerican stone-sculptures collected by Bullock (1824a)

Bullock skilfully adapted to these circumstances. Although his initiative was essentially private, he was in possession of official presentation letters, thus, played a role within international diplomacy (Costeloe 2006: 275-309). Also Bullock mastered personal relationships with Mexican authorities and members of the local *intelligentsia*, who were informed that Bullock's journey 'was solely to acquire scientific information' (Bullock 1824a: 28). This was, however, a misleading statement. For being influenced by the works of Alexander Von Humboldt (1814, 1822a, 1822b) –the most complete, systematic and systematic studies of Latin America (see Pratt 1992: 111-134; Keen 1973: 33, Labastida 1999: 99-171)–, Bullock played a key role in the early nineteenth-century British vogue for this rich and vast region (see Medina-González 1998: 14). He was one of first English travellers who attempted to develop business, mercantile and mining activities in Mexico, a country that offered new niches for foreign investment, (King 1996: 117-124; Bullock 1824a, 1825a).

However, it would be unfair to interpret Bullock's activities in Mexico solely as the manifestation of British informal imperialism (*contra* Aguirre 2005: 2). Even though *Six Months of*

*Residence* and *MM* did transmit messages that promoted and even justified British expansion over Mexico (Bullock 1824a: v-vii, 103, 203, 497; Bullock 1824c: 4-6), it would be wrong to reduce Bullock's 'antiquarian interest to the pursuit of economic advantage' (Edison 1999: 712). Instead, it can be argued Bullock's collecting activities articulated a broader mixture of economic, ideological and scientific agendas that, according to Pratt (1992: 5, 17-37), evoked a Eurocentric form of 'planetary consciousness'. In fact, the main source of inspiration of Bullock's antiquarian in Mexico (Medina-González 1998: 34, 62) –Humboldt– has been recognised as a pivotal figure for the raising of the study of American Antiquity to a 'high scientific level' amongst European intellectuals (Keen 1973: 336), a process that partly derived for his integration of archaeological interpretations of ancient America into such a 'planetary consciousness' (Pratt 1992: 131-132).

Even though this 'planetary consciousness' has been associated with a series of practices and representations that served to encode and legitimise the aspirations of economic expansion and empire (Pratt 1992: 131-132), Bullock's collecting activities in Mexico took place within a 'dialogic space of transculturation' (Levin-Rojó 2001: 30). Indeed, locals acted beyond responses of mere resistance, complicity, accommodation, or even collaboration, in relation to Bullock's antiquarian pursuits (Edison 1999: 1). According to *Six Months of Residence* (Bullock 1824a: 329), some Mexican scholars and political authorities were more than helpful in making accessible material evidence of their Pre-Columbian past to the British traveller. Moreover, it was thanks to the support of Lucas Alamán, Mexican Minister of Domestic and Foreign Affairs, that Bullock (1824a: 329) managed to get the loan of the Mexican Codices, Pre-Columbian documents that were considered so valuable in Mexico that he was not able to part with them until he promised to return them to their country of origin, after being copied in England. Thus, it seems that the Mexican authorities were double-acting both as promoters of Pre-Columbian antiquities in Europe, while making use of strategies to maintain authority over the destiny of their country's indigenous heritage. Indeed, Bullock's written guide to *Ancient Mexico* made openly known that the Mexican Government 'was anxious to diffuse knowledge of Spanish America and to cultivate intercourse with Europe' (Bullock 1824b: 4-5). Such an attitude can only be understood if we consider that from the late 1700s onwards the local *intelligentsia* had developed a cult of Aztec Antiquity as an essential paradigm of Mexican nationalism (Phelan 1960:762-770).

Therefore, it can be argued that Bullock's collecting of Mexican antiquities took place within a frame of 'symbiotic transculturation', a notion that introduces the idea of agents from different cultural backgrounds working together for mutual and reciprocal benefits, in which similar ends were pursued. This is a relationship that has hitherto poorly recorded in the scholarly literature about the intrinsic historical relationships between politics and archaeology (e.g. Trigger 1989, Kohl & Fawcett 1995; Lyons & Papadopolous 2002): it entails the intersection between

nationalistic and imperialistic agendas for the formation of archaeological productions, including displays. Further manifestations of this phenomenon will be studied in Chapter 5 and 6.

Bullock relied on a number of people during the production of his display. For instance, the Italian artist A. Aglio (1777-1857), who had plenty of experience in drawing Classical antiquities (Bryan 1886:8), made an enlarged copy of ‘a very fine Aztek manuscript, on maguey, in 21 folders or leaves, on which are depicted the migrations of that extraordinary people’, which has been identified as the Codex Boturini (Bullock 1824b: 24; Wason 1831: 253-274; Graham 1993: 60). By virtue of his previous experience in the decoration of theatres, mansions and churches (see Ferrario 1837), it appears that Aglio was also the designer of the interior ornamentation of the galleries for the set up of Bullock’s Mexican display. In the case of *AM*, this process consisted of superimposing drawings and adornment on the gallery’s original Egyptian décor, as Aglio’s panoramic view of the exhibit shows (Figure 11). Considering the complexity of the display ornamentation is also plausible that Bullock employed other technicians for production purposes. However, no documentation survives about the details of this collaborative process.



Figure 11. Panoramic View of *Ancient Mexico* (From Bullock 1824b)

The panoramic view of *AM* (included in the display’s written-guide) was an additional and relevant outcome of the display production: it was clearly designed as a self-explanatory instrument for the exploration of the exhibit, as a souvenir of the occasion, and as an eloquent advertising tool.

It was precisely in the advertising realm in which Bullock’s production excelled over many subsequent nineteenth-century exhibitions on Mesoamerica. For with a gift of self-promotion, Bullock employed the second edition of his popular travelogue (Baquedano 1993: 359) to announce the opening of the exhibits (Bullock 1825a), placed announcements in the printed



press, and ensured that at least six of the most famous British weekly periodicals of the time reviewed the displays (LIG 1824a, 1824b, 1824c, 1824d, 1824e, 1824f, 1825; GMM 1824, 1825; LDM 1824a, 1824b; NMM 1824; 1825, CJJ 1824). He also offered a private inauguration for journalists and special guests, which along with the public inauguration, was actually reviewed by the *Times* (TMN 1824a; 1824b). Thus, the British showman created a comprehensive publicity package to benefit the public consumption of his book, his exhibitions, and his guidebooks.

The displays guidebooks with their visual imagery constitute the main documentary sources for studying Bullock's exhibitions. They contain a brief introduction to the subject of display, describe their contents, and show the arrangement of the exhibits. Rather than following a technical style, these documents adopted a colloquial tone, which reflects Bullock's interest in making his displays accessible. This partly explains why *AM* & *AMM* rarely appear in histories of the Western museum. For at a time when this institution was trying to differentiate itself from other spectacles (Cf. Bennett 1998: 1), Bullock's displays combined education and amusement in the same package, thus occupying a grey area between the leisure business and the museum. Bullock's guidebooks are also crucial for understanding the manner in which his displays formulated a series of representations of the Aztecs, the topic of the following section.

#### **4.1.2. Representation**

Bullock represented Mexico, first and foremost, by the names of his exhibitions: Mexico was either 'Ancient' or 'Modern'. According to Fane (1993: 257), this chronological division 'anticipated the distinction of the archaeological and ethnological installation of the modern museum'. However, the names of the displays clearly echoed the traditional tripartite model of history defined by the periods of Antiquity, Middle-Ages, and Modernity. Diverse display technologies supported the articulation of this structure of time-division throughout the displays:

First, the guidebook of *AM* commenced with a brief narrative of the period that separated Mexican antiquity from its modern era: the Colonial times.

Second, the suggested visitor's route initiated with the presentation of the oil paintings representing the event that marked the beginning of the Mexican Colonial period: the Spanish Conquest. Two sources were employed for narrating this event: Hernan Cortes' *Five Letters* and Bernal Diaz del Castillo's *Historia Verdadera*, both of them sixteenth-century primary chronicles of the affair. The passages quoted from these texts, the guide's narrative, and the subject of the paintings help us to understand Bullock's opinions regarding the period of Spanish supremacy over the New World. Indeed, the British showman thought that the Hispanic Conquest had been a combined process of military, religious and, political domination. All these facets were

illustrated by particular oil paintings showing ‘the Battle of Tabasco’, the destruction of an Idol, and an image of Captain H. Cortes ‘placing fetters on Moctezuma’, the Aztec Emperor.

Third, Bullock considered that the Spanish invasion had been a ‘sanguinary contest’, which not only destroyed the splendour of the ancient Mexican world, but ‘annihilated the race of Moctezuma, and overthrew the throne of Mexico’ (Bullock 1824b: B). These views served to create an effect of rupture between Mexican antiquity and its subsequent period. It is very likely that Bullock’s religious background (see Medina González 1998: 44-50) influenced the shaping of a tragic view of the Conquest, which was depicted as an unsuccessful affair that had led to the control of a rich territory, but failed in its most important aim: the Christianization of the indigenous population (Medina González 1998: 19-20). Indeed, talking about the Aztec religion, the guidebook (Bullock 1824b: B) stated that the ‘Spaniards have made but slight changes from a preceding era’. Such views echoed the basic assumptions of the ‘Black Legend’ –a historical narrative that presented a negative judgement of the Spanish Conquest, by stressing the inhumanity of the conquerors regarding the indigenous populations– whose origins can be traced back to the sixteenth century, but achieved great popularity among nineteenth century British historians (Keen 1984: 153, 174, 269).

Bullock could not escape from the romanticist tropes often employed by contemporary travel literature to frame the narratives of conquest on an older imperial rhetoric. Following a style of ‘sensationalised drama’ (see Pratt 1992: 86-89), Bullock described the Spanish Conquest ‘an expedition in which true history equalled the wildest fictions of Romance’ (Bullock 1824b: B), a narrative that aimed to boost the sensibility and the emotions of the visitor, inviting him/her to imagine the ‘endurance of sufferings’ experienced by both sides of the military conflict:

The Spaniards ‘aided by those terrible engines, which imitated the thunder of the gods, and were infinitely more destructive; united with those dreadful animals which appalled the Aborigines beyond what ever fabled Centaur; bound together by an iron discipline; and incited by every passion which can inflame the human heart (Bullock 1824b: B).

Such a statement deserves our attention since it exposes a number of value-judgements that were implicit in rhetoric of ‘conspicuous innocence’, which acquired meaning in relation to an assumed guilt of conquest (Pratt 1992: 57). Thus, at first glance, the visitors learnt that the conquerors defeated indigenous peoples, only due to *technological* superiority. This coupled with the revelation of a sentimental stereotype of the conquered people (Pratt 1992: 57), who were described as superstitious and, thus, ignorant. The combination of these readings resulted in a subtle discrediting of both agents involved in the cultural encounter, since a ‘desperate band of adventurers’ could only conquer a ‘wealthy nation’ due to its superstitious nature and its technological inferiority (Bullock 1824b: B). In fact, the articulation of this type of ‘anti-conquest’ historiography (Pratt 1992: 57) explains the coexistence of two opposing views in Bullock’s exhibit. For in spite of the fact that the written-guide (Bullock 1824b: B) referred to

‘the extraordinary expedition of Cortes’, it also concluded that the Spanish Conquest had just brought ‘Mexican History to [...] utter doubt and *darkness*’ (Bullock 1824b: 19-20).

‘Darkness’ indeed expressed the normative valorisation suggested by the metaphor of light and obscurity of the tripartite model of historical time (Calinescu 1987: 20). Thus, Bullock constructed Mexican Antiquity as a period of ancient splendour, an interpretation that echoed the 1700s Orientalist discourse about the ‘glorious Indian Past’ or the ‘Hindu Golden Age’ (Singh 1996: 53, 66, 68). This construction also expressed the adoption of the Aztec World as a ‘Classical Antiquity’ by the Mexican Creole intelligentsia, a process that, as explained before, was framed within self-identity, nationalistic, anti-Spanish inspirations (Phelan 1960:760).

In consonance with these views, Bullock represented the Mexican Colonial period as the nocturnal and oblivious ‘Dark Ages’ (Calinescu 1987: 20). It was not strange that this period deserved exclusion, which was actually manifested by the lack of a proper and independent exhibit. Comparatively, modern Mexico was represented as a Renaissance, since Bullock (1824b: B) believed, as many contemporary Mexican nationalist intellectuals did, that Independence had not only liberated Mexico from Spain, but also transformed it into an ‘enlightened country’.

Bullock’s narrative of the early history of Mexico was also simplified through two display strategies:

- The first was the personalisation of the historical events: the Conquest was depicted as an affair dependent on the decisions of two principal figures: Cortes and Moctezuma. Thus, Mexican antiquity signified basically ‘Moctezuma’s world’, while the Aztecs were described as ‘Moctezuma’s race’. This treatment echoed previous strategies for the categorisation of Mesoamerican material culture.
- The second consisted on focusing on Moctezuma’s reign and ultimately only on the Aztecs without consideration of earlier or contemporary indigenous periods or cultures. Thus, *AM* homogenised Mexican antiquity, a strategy that had a symbolic consequence: for it denied the diversity of Pre-Columbian indigenous societies, an operation that anticipated a normative trope of late colonialist discourse in anthropological museums (Russell 1997: 238).

The representation of *AM* tried to create a ‘sense of place’. Bullock (1824b: 26) did not place his Pre-Columbian collection within traditional glass cases: instead he created three-dimensional scenery that conveyed some idea of the ‘Temple of Mexico’. This recreation was achieved by a complex interaction between arrangement and décor. The former was created by symmetric ordering, forming a general layout marked by the intersection of two axes formed by the location of three prominent pieces: the casts of monumental sculpture. Such an outline resembled the transepts –effectively the arms of the cross–, which made up the most common

ground plan of Western ecclesiastical architecture (Schloender 1999: 100). This was coupled with the use of the Aztec Calendar as the central up-front ornament of the gallery, a decorative arrangement that clearly recalled the apse of a Christian building towards which all other decoration, including the enlarged reproduction of the Codex Boturini, tended. Thus, the effect of a 'Temple' was truly manufactured by quoting Western architectural and religious design features that could be easily recognised by the audience.

This setting also served to create a spectacle in which Mexico and its antiquities were set up for the visual examination of the visitor. This act of observing was not only stimulated by the written guide (Bullock 1824c: 6), but also by the panoramic views of *AM* and *AMM* (Figure 12) that depicted visitors examining attentively the objects put on display.

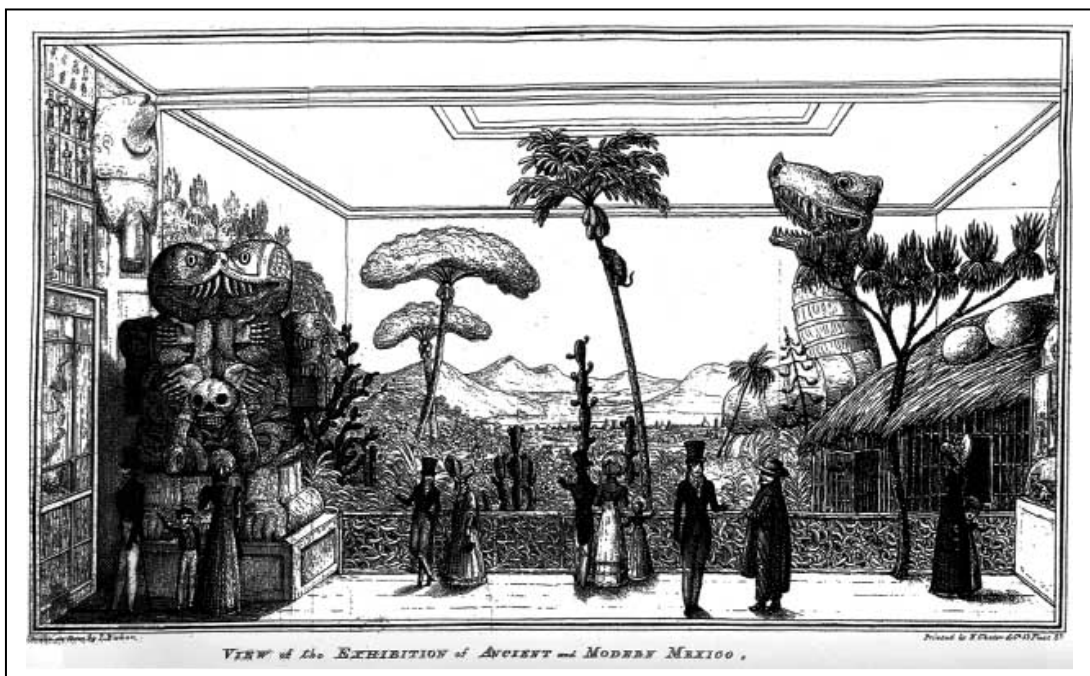


Figure 12. Panoramic View of *Ancient and Modern Mexico* (From Bullock 1825b)

It was precisely by a series of visual processes that Bullock's displays attempted to assert objectivity and authority under the combined banner of public education and scientific inquiry. According to the guidebook, the view of Mexico City presented at *AMM* 'will fix in mind which cannot be acquired from mere descriptions' (Bullock 1825b:6). Thus, picturing the mind of the visitor as a receptacle where information could be *imprinted*, Bullock pointed out the imperfection of language for knowledge transmission, emphasising by the same token the importance of observation for learning purposes. This idea was captioned by the guidebook that declared that the 'eye is a fine instructor' (Bullock 1824b: 6), a statement that both showed the fascination with the visual and its effects –a key feature of modernism (Mirzoeff 1998b: 4)– and

exposed Bullock's assumed position within the philosophical school of Empiricism, which had maintained a dominant influence in early nineteenth-century British intellectual circles due to the writings of J. Locke (1632-1704), G. Berkeley (1685-1753) and D. Hume (1711- 1776) (Padsem 1912: 385; Sutcliff 1961: 102-119).

It has been convincingly argued that images claim truth to nature and so to science, by persuading the viewer with naturalism (Molineaux 1997: 3). This effect is particularly evident in pictures used in scientific descriptions that, in their appearance of being exactly what they represent, have been long considered 'neutral' illustrations (Shanks 1997: 84). *AM* used this strategy to legitimate its purposes, seducing the visitor by pointing to its visual properties. Thus, the guidebook explained that Bullock (1824b: 5) had combined in the best manner 'all that he could find to *illustrate* the ancient capital, its monuments, religion, inscriptions, feelings and customs [in order to] promote the interest in science and learning' (*my italics*). This assertion subtly suggested three additional messages. One was the idea that objects could be direct and transparent mediums for the transmission of knowledge, rather than subjects of representation. The second consisted of elaborating on the rationale of the formation of its collection 'in science, not in plunder', a strategy that was often employed by nineteenth-century Western scientific discourse to justify the Western appropriation of indigenous material culture from all over the world (Greenhalgh 1988: 88). Third, the discourse legitimated the museum's experience as a source of wisdom. This message was further elaborated by Bullock (1824b: 5-6), who wrote that 'it would perhaps be thought to be attaching too much consequence to this exhibition, where it stated that all requisite knowledge might be procured here, but we will venture to claim merits of doing more towards supplying valuable information on the matter than can anywhere be found'. Taking such expectations into account, *AM* can certainly be considered a notable predecessor of the scientific, educational and collecting discourses that were further elaborated at World Fairs, ethnographic displays, and anthropological museums during the Victorian Era (Coombes 1994).

It was perhaps due to his vested interest in science and education that Bullock was truly concerned about the veracity of his display. Quoting literary resources, including the opinions of scientists, and presenting material evidence, *AM* tried to gain authority. In addition, a series of display technologies were devised in order to assert the accuracy and truthfulness of the scenery and its contents. Apart from describing many decorative elements as 'faithful', the written-guide stated that some items had been 'introduced just to give the atmosphere as much *verisimilitude* as possible' (Bullock 1824c: 6-7, 10, *my italics*). Such an operation was not pointless: for 'it was precisely this kind of accuracy that created certainty, the effect of "reality"' (Mitchell 1988: 7-8).

In order to legitimate the veracity of the display, the catalogue stressed the genuineness of the artefacts exhibited. Apart from using *de facto* labels –such as 'original map' and 'Aztek manuscript' (Bullock 1825b: 23), this was done through the articulation of three strategies.

- It stated the original provenance of the objects, which not only contextualised them in their most plausible Pre-Columbian setting, but also suggested their function. So, the ‘Mexican Eagle’ was ‘believed to have been from the palace of Moctezuma’, whereas one vase of oriental alabaster was ‘supposed to have been in a Temple’ (Bullock 1825b: 29). These contextualisations, however, were mere speculations.
- It indicated the location of the discovery of the artefacts. For example, the guide clearly stated that the ‘knives of obsidian’ came from the ‘Pyramids of Teotihuacan’.
- It mentioned former owner of the artefacts: e.g. the Pre-Columbian manuscripts were consistently identified as having belonged to the famous seventeenth-century collector Lorenzo Boturini.

Facing the competitive London nineteenth-century show business (Altick 1978), Bullock also qualified his Mexican collection as ‘unique’, the ‘most perfect and valuable’, ‘the only yet discovered’, and the ‘first one’ to reach England (Bullock 1824B; 32, 41, 48). These categorisations acquired special significance because, as explained before, Bullock disseminated the idea that the Spanish Conquest had destroyed almost all Pre-Columbian heritage.

The obsession with authenticity and the claims of truthfulness were key strategies for supporting Bullock’s representation of Aztec Culture. For *AM* challenged the propositions posed by the influential works of Cornelius De Pauw (1768), Comte de Buffon (1749–1778), and William Robertson (1777), by presenting a series of innovative arguments, which were further supported by the combination of ‘factual’ evidence –i.e. material culture— and a range of technologies of display. For instance, the guidebook introduced Aztec culture through the natural and man-made features of its capital Tenochtitlan (Bullock 1824b: B), an approach previously developed by Humboldt (Pratt 1992: 120). The influence of the Prussian traveller-scientist can be also detected in the use of the word “Cordilleras” to describe the setting of the ancient city. For such an expression not only echoed the famous *VIEWS of Cordilleras* (1814), but it also served to denote the richness, variety and strength of Mexican nature (Bullock (1824b: 7), a view that contradicted Buffon’s and Du Pauw’s idea of a weak and meagrely developed America (Medina González 1998: 17).

The catalogue also presented a description of Tenochtitlan, which emphasized its size, urban layout, the monumentality of its buildings and its well-organised market. By exhibiting ‘an original map’ of this city, *AM* provided further visual evidence of some of these features (Bullock 1824b:B). The recreation of the ‘Temple of Mexico’ vouched for the development of monumental architecture among the Aztecs. At the same time, the presentation of Mexican Codices proved the existence of Pre-Columbian hieroglyphic writing (Bullock 1824b: 20). The guidebook also quoted an account by Bernal Diaz del Castillo, who described the magnificence of Moctezuma’s court, the splendour of his palace, and the luxury of his life. (Bullock 1824b:

10). All these elements serve to transmit a single idea: that Aztecs had achieved a degree of cultural complexity. For, as explained in Chapter 3, the presence of cities, monumental architecture, commerce, writing, and an organised form of government have been long considered normative traits of the notion of ‘civilisation’ in Western thought.

By this and the above-mentioned ideas, Bullock managed to assert arguments to prove wrong many of the foundations of W. Robertson’s interpretations about ancient Mexico (for a review see Appendix 1). Furthermore, the display’s guidebook clearly pointed out the reason why the Scottish historian had reached mistaken conclusions on the development of Aztecs:

The statement of an eyewitness must ever be preferable than those conjectural accounts of modern historians who never having visited the country, nor heard the still remaining vestiges of the works of its former greatness described, have tended to mislead the world on the subject. Among these, no author is more mistaken than [...] Robertson whose well-written volume contains no information of the former state of America (Bullock 1824b: 5, 1825b; 21)

However, *AM* could not escape from reflecting some of the views of contemporary literature regarding Pre-Columbian cultures. As much as Humboldt (1814: 39-45), Bullock found it impossible to appreciate the aesthetic value of Aztec productions. Evidence of this can be found in the generalised use of the terms ‘curiosity’ and ‘curios’ for the description of the exhibit holdings, for it has been convincingly proved that from the late eighteenth century onwards these nouns served to express interest in indigenous artefacts, without passing an aesthetic judgement on them (Thomas 1991: 130). Furthermore, the guidebook often employed derogative adjectives to describe the appearance of Aztec sculpture (Bullock 1824b: 20-22).

However, this did not mean that Bullock overlooked the fact that an advanced material and technological development was behind the production of Aztec statuary. This could be clearly appreciated in the description of a jade ‘idol representing the sun’ that today has been identified as a depiction of Quetzalcoatl, since the guide recognised that it deserved admiration due to its ‘workmanship’ (Bullock 1824b: 42-54; MacEwan 1994:73). In fact, this operation can be identified as an early manifestation of the dichotomy between ‘art & artefact’ that prevailed in the reception of Pre-Columbian artefacts amongst Westerners until the beginnings of the twentieth century (Williams 1985: 147).

According to Patzory (1983: 90), nineteenth-century studies often described the Aztecs as barbaric, gruesome and bloodthirsty. *AM* was one of the first displays, if not the earliest, that articulated this image. This operation took place through the treatment of Aztec religion, a topic that occupied a central position in the display narrative, since Bullock selected a religious building –a Temple—as the thematic scenery of *AM* and its printed guide associated a large number of Aztec artefacts, predominantly sculptures, to religious entities or practices. The display narrative also devoted a considerable number of entries and quotations to the

representation of Aztec religion. However, the great complexity of Aztec Religion (for a review see López-Austin & López-Luján 1999: 223-229) was simplified to three places common of exotic fascination.

The first was the enormous, bizarre, and grotesque appearance of Aztec deities. This was done by employing labels –such as ‘monstrous deities’—to describe some of the sculptures (Bullock 1824b: 30) or by describing their formal characteristics with a series of superlatives. For example, Huitzilopochtli, god of war, ‘had terrible eyes’. Another sculpture was ‘too disgusting and horrible’ (Bullock 1824b: 21, 30).

Another way of simplifying Aztec Religion, by adding a rather morbid attention to it, consisted of describing it as a ‘the murderous idolatry of Mexico’. In fact, to reinforce this idea, the guidebook employed the term ‘idol’ to name a number of sculptures (Bullock 1824b: 39). Section 4.1 has already examined some of the implications carried by the terms ‘idol’ and ‘Idolatry’ from the 1500s to the 1700s in Western culture. However, here it is important to consider the meaning that both expressions acquired in nineteenth-century missionary discourse related to colonialism: Thomas (1991: 128) has suggested, indigenous ‘religion could be characterised as idolatry, because this meant that “idols”, as objectifications of the false religion, could be abstracted from their context in native worship and destroyed, or *displayed* (*my italics*). It is not known whether Bullock extracted any of the sculptures from a religious context, but indeed, he re-contextualised them in his display, attaching a series of meanings that can only be understood from the perspective of Western Christianity. For example, the guidebook associated Aztecs gods with the Christian iconography of demonic devotion: Tezcatlipoca, the ‘God of Infernal Regions’, was ‘covered with figures representing little devils with tails of serpents’ (Bullock 1824b: 21-22).

Aztec Religion was also simplified by picturing sacred practices as violent and bloody acts of worship (Bullock 1824b: 20). A dramatic tone was added to it by emphasising the practice of human sacrifice. Thus, the guidebook stated that the Aztecs sacrificed ‘thousands of human victims’ (Bullock 1824b: 4). Furthermore, quoting Bernal Diaz del Castillo’s chronicle of the Conquest, it was stated that the Spaniards have found ‘hearts of human victims’ burning in temples ‘stained with human blood [...] in such quantity as to give a very offensive smell’ (Bullock 1824b 21-22). This breathtaking and sensationalist narrative was given veracity through the exhibition of objects that had been presumably associated with such religious practices. For instance, knives of obsidian were said to have been ‘used foe sacrifices by the priests’ (Bullock 1824b: 47). The logic of this representation shows that in order to articulate a single argument, *AM* could put in operation three different, but complementary representational strategies. The first of these was the exposition of an interpretation using an affirmative registry, which transformed a simple idea (or an opinion) into an unquestionable fact. The second consisted of the presentation of artefacts, which acted as material evidence of the interpretation. Third, there



was the incorporation of quotes from a known literary source: this served both to colour and to provide further historical rigor to the interpretation.

Housing *AM* in the Egyptian Hall was significant for representation purposes. Bullock (1824b: 39) found similarities between Egyptian and Aztec cultures, particularly in the appearance of their sculptures. This interpretation was reflected in the descriptions of certain items. For instance, the catalogue stated that a bust of a female had a 'strong resemblance to Isis' while another statue 'strongly resemble[d] the Egyptian Sphinx' (Bullock 1824b: 3, 35). The guide's narrative actually invited the visitor to find both stylistic and formal analogies between Mesoamerican and Egyptian sculptures: thus, it was explained that the statue denominated 'the Aztec Princess' gave 'the appearance, at first sight, of the front of the Egyptian Sphinx, to which the resemblance of the head-dress greatly contributed' (Bullock 1824b: 39). Bullock also stressed that Mexican and Egyptian hieroglyphic writing systems were 'almost alike' (Bullock 1824b: 47). Moreover, through the superposition –and thus blending– of Aztec motives over the Egyptian décor of the gallery, *AM* reinforced the idea that both cultures were related, or even the same.

The associations between Aztec and Egyptian culture represented in *AM* translated Humboldt's interpretations. For instance, the guidebook pointed out that the headdress of the 'Aztec Princess' 'greatly contributed' to its resemblance to Egyptian sculpture. The display narrative also exposed the similarities between Egyptian and Mexican pyramids (see Chapter 5). However, in contrast to the works of the Prussian scientist that only traced cultural analogies, *AM* did propose that Aztec and Egyptian cultures had a 'kindred origin [that] can hardly be doubted' (Bullock 1824b: 47). Furthermore, although not entirely explicit, the display narrative did appear to suggest that Aztec culture originated in Egypt (Bullock 1824b: 39). Such views clearly situated Bullock's representation of Mesoamerica within the frame of the diffusionist explanations that were of central concern to Pritchardian Ethnology, the most influential trend of anthropological thought in Britain during the first half of the nineteenth century (Stocking 1987: 49). This approach carried an important political implication: by locating the birthplace of Aztec culture outside America, Bullock implicitly denied Mesoamerican local capacity for cultural development. In addition, the guidebook asserted that Egyptians were superior to the Aztecs, a valorisation that relied (again) on Bullock's prejudiced interpretation about Aztec religion. For example, the guidebook stated that 'the worship of the Mexicans appeared to have been more monstrous and bloody than the Egyptian' (Bullock 1824b: 3).

*AM* proposed that Hinduism and Buddhism were the sources of Aztec religion, including the practice of human sacrifice (Bullock 1824b:3). This interpretation solely relied on the affirmation that 'the Temple and Cavern of the Holy Mountain of the New World differ[ed] little from the Dome of Jaggherhaut, the cave of Elephanta or Ellora and the High Place of Oriental sacredness'. It is not possible to ascertain to which monuments Bullock was referring to in this statement. However, it can be argued that by proposing India as the vein of depravity

and violence for places even as far away as Mexico, Bullock was not only further supporting diffusionist theory, but also following the paradigms of *Orientalism* (Said 1978: 40). Indeed, his argument not only ‘essentialised’ the Orient as a synonym for the Asiatic East by grouping –and thus homogenising– different cultural traditions (i.e. Buddhist and Hindu religions), but also represented it to symbolise terror, depravity, and violence, all of them values that configured a negative mirror of the West (Said 1978: 74, 95, 205).

As explained before, with a vein of self-publicity, Bullock ensured that at least seven periodicals of the time covered the development of both *AM* and *AMM*. The responses of these media to the display’s representation of the Aztecs will be the subject of the following section.

#### 4.1.3. Interpretation

Press coverage shows that Bullock not only exerted a great deal of influence on the reporters’ response to *AM* and *AMM*, but managed to convince them of the general outline of the representation of the Aztecs that was articulated by these displays. However, this did not preclude that the reporters further elaborated on certain subjects, or even that their independent opinion was expressed.

This is particularly clear regarding the values ascribed to the Mexican antiquities, which were described in many articles under the denomination of ‘curios’, ‘curiosities’ (CJJ 1824: 29: 186, GMM 1825), and even ‘wonders’ (LMM 1824b), all of them terms that indicated the great attention –and even amazement– that these artefacts aroused amongst their audiences. In this respect, it was noteworthy the opinion of the *Classical Journal* (CJJ 1824: 29: 186), which clearly stated that ‘the curiosity, not the beauty, the novelty, not the art, eminently entitled [the Mexican Antiquities] to learned attention’. Indeed, this assertion confirms that some visitors neither considered Pre-Columbian artefacts as ‘Art’ nor appreciated their aesthetic values. Such valuation was made explicit by the *New Monthly Magazine* that described the Mexican Codices as ‘rude pictures’ (NMM 1824:164); yet, this assertion seems to contradict Bullock’s opinion about the state of development achieved by Mesoamerican writing systems.

*The Literary Gazette* (LIG 1824c: 237) elaborated the traditional categorization of civilisation and culture that was constructed by the ‘opposition of Art and artefact’ (Williams 1985: 147) since it compared *AM* with Mr. Day’s exhibition of Greek sculpture, which was open to inspection in an adjoining room of the Egyptian Hall. According to the reporter, ‘Mr. Day’s ‘grand casts and fine pictures appeared more advanced than usual, *from the contrast*’ (LIG 1824c: 237, *my italics*). By giving a new sense to the language employed by Bullock, this article established a new dichotomy, by stating that ‘the *monsters of Mexican idolatry* were lost in the contemplation of *Grecian art*’ (LIG 1824c: 237, *my italics*)

Most journals were convinced of the links between Aztec and Egyptian culture, as much as of the cultural superiority of the latter over the former (NMM 1825:124; LMM 1824a(Σ: AC 2008), CJJ 1824: 29: 189; GMM 1824: 94:1:70; GMM 1825: 95:2: 168). Indeed, this clearly shows the display's efficiency in making its representations both intelligible and convincing for its audiences. However, not all the reporters agreed with the concluding arguments that were expressed in this respect by the guidebook. For instance, the *Classical Journal* (CJJ 1824: 29-189) actually refuted the possibility that Mexican culture derived from ancient Egypt, by arguing that a common origin only could be established on the basis of language and physiognomic analogies. Such an opinion clearly shows the increasing importance that comparative philology and physical anthropology began to acquire within British ethnological enquiry during the first third of the nineteenth century (Stocking 1987: 56-69).

The *Classical Journal* did not entirely dismiss diffusionist interpretations for it proposed that early contact by settlement or conquest could be a plausible hypothesis for explaining the similarities between Aztec and Egyptian productions (CJJ 1824: 29: 189). Furthermore, by examining the content of the Codex Boturini, which depicts the mythical peregrination of the Aztec people to Tenochtitlan, its reporter proposed that Asiatic and Aztec analogies were the result of emigrations (CJJ 1824: 29: 189). In these statements, we can still detect the influence of Pritchardian Ethnology since, according to Stocking (1987: 51), this anthropological school proposed a broader sense of the notion of cultural diffusion, which included both the dissemination of ideas and the migration of peoples.

The British press sought to both awake and capitalise on a number of political, economic and academic forces after the examination of Bullock's displays. For instance, an article explained that the lack of previous knowledge of the Aztecs could cause either neglect or avidity of the part of the viewing public, a statement that confirms that Bullock was able to convince the display's audience that his collection of Mexican antiquities was the 'first' in the United Kingdom (CJJ 1824: 29: 175). However, the reporter went further, proposing a discussion regarding the scant support received by British antiquarian research in comparison to France, a rhetoric that finally served to claim that the value of archaeological investigations lay in their use for political and commercial enterprises in other territories (CJJ 1824: 29: 176). Therefore, the reception of *AM* shows that even before the Victorian period the disciplines related to anthropology –particularly ethnography and archaeology– attempted to appear as indispensable to the pursuits of imperialistic expansion (Coombes 1994: 107).

The interpretation of *AM* also motivated further collecting of Mesoamerican artefacts in Britain. At least, this seems the purpose of the *Times* (TMN 1824: 4: 9), which after reviewing *AM* asked: 'why is this collection exceedingly meagre? Why have we not a much greater assortment of objects to illustrate the civil and religious customs of these singular people? Such questions

were later answered by a demand: ‘We might at least have as much from Mexico as we have from Herculaneum or Pompey’.

Finally, the response to *AM* in the Georgian printed press shows that this display was a predecessor of mass-culture entertainment, a phenomenon usually associated with twentieth-century leisure culture (Schwartz 1998: 7). It appears that early industrialisation in Britain was able to generate changes on the demands of public leisure (Cf. Cross 1990: 74-75, which could be plentifully satisfied by a both rational and entertaining complex spectacle such as *AM*). Almost twenty years later, another exhibition on Mexican Antiquities displayed at Pall Mall, London, aimed to generate another accessible representation of Mesoamerica, but following a modest format. This exhibit constitutes the following case of study of this chapter.

#### 4.3. CHRONOLOGY AT DISPLAY: CHARLES YOUNG’S EXHIBITION ON MEXICAN ANTIQUITIES IN PALL MALL GALLERY, LONDON (1855)

A catalogue published in 1855 gives notice of an *Exhibition on Mexican Antiquities* (here and henceforth *EMA*) held in Pall Mall Gallery, London that, in spite of its historical importance, has been almost entirely dismissed by the literature (Young 1855). This display was produced by Charles Young, a man whose personal details are unknown, but managed to attract the attention of two the most popular Victorian periodicals: *The Athenaeum* (ATN 1855: 297) and *The Illustrated London News* (ILN 1855a: 144).

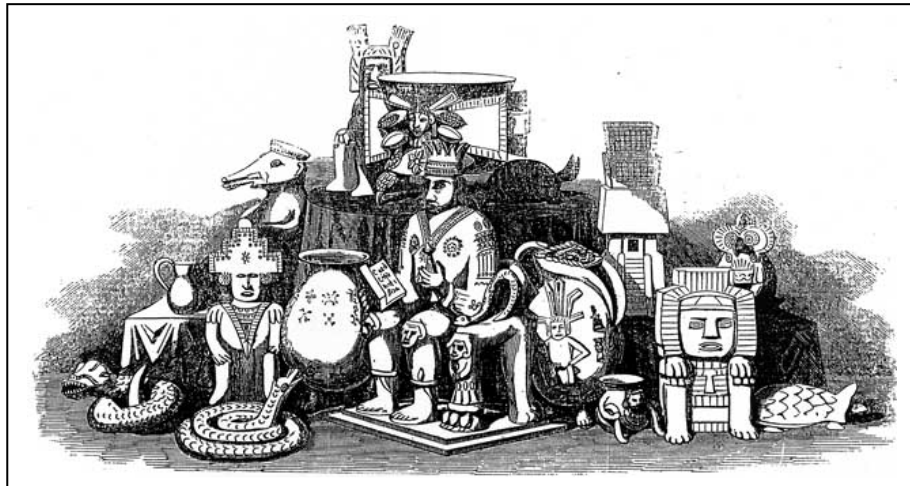


Figure 13. Young’s collection of Mexican Antiquities  
(From ILN 1855a: 144)

As its title promised, the *Illustrated London News* published an illustration of a group of objects exhibited by Young (Figure 13): this may be the first graphic representation of Mesoamerican artefacts published in the European public press. Furthermore, its inception in this particular

medium ensured that this image of Mesoamerican objects enjoyed wide circulation among British middle-class people, the bulk of readers of this periodical.

This illustration only showed a representative sample of the *EMA*: this was composed of more than five hundred and twenty eight artefacts: sculpture, terracotta figurines, stone-objects, cotton fabrics, and a model of a Teocalli (Young 1855). Such an amazing number of archaeological objects in a single display demands attention to the ways in which they were obtained, translated to London, and later organised during the production of the exhibit.

#### 4.3.1. Production

According to Young's catalogue, the entire collection was discovered by Mexican soldiers, excavating trenches for the protection of Mexico City during the invasion of American troops, an historical event that took place in 1847 (Young 1855: 2). The catalogue did not state the location of the discovery of the artefacts. However, it is known that the excavation of trenches as a means of protection was a common defensive feature during several battles of the American-Mexican War (Johanssen 1985: 25).

Young (1855: 2) assured that that he had obtained the artefacts directly from their discoverers, but 'so jealous were the Mexican Antiquaries that such objects should be taken out of the country, that nothing else than a special order of the Minister of the Interior enabled the proprietor to remove them'. This statement reveals the political context in which Young acquired his Pre-Columbian collection. In October 1845, the Mexican government issued the last of a series of laws prohibiting the export of Mexican monuments and antiquities, a decree that was endorsed in June 1853 (Olivé Negrete 1996: III: 791): that is a few months before the opening of Young's exhibition. Thus, by virtue of legislation, Young illegally exported his collection out of Mexico. Naturally, this position was embraced by Mexican antiquaries, including those working on National Museum of Mexico, the institution that since 1830 had been responsible for the local custody of Mexican Pre-Columbian heritage (Bernal 1980: 130-141).

Young was aware of the illegal (and perhaps unethical) issues surrounding his collecting activities in Mexico and employed this information to increase the value of the collections at the display setting: e.g. the model of a Teocalli was described as 'one of the rarest [...]: great regret was expressed at its removal from the country by the curators of the National Museum of Mexico' (Young 1855: 21). Scarcity, a history of conflict over possession, and emotional charges thus served as indexes of value for the audience.

Paradoxically, *EMA* narrative implicitly constructed Young as the 'rescuer' of Mexican antiquities. Although Bullock had previously employed this rhetoric, Young's argumentative

frame was entirely innovative for it subtly associated salvage activities with the potential risk for the preservation of the artefacts in time of war. This propaganda was quite commonly used to justify the Western appropriation of non-Western cultural treasures during the Victorian times (see Coombes 1994: 10-11). However, *EMA* used this strategy to further undermine the capacity of Mexicans to appreciate and take care of their own past. Therefore, we can accept that the production of *EMA* appears intrinsically linked to the dynamics of unequal power relationships between foreigners (or invaders) and local populations, which has been identified as a constant phenomenon of colonial situations during the nineteenth- and twentieth- centuries (Barkan 2002:19-38). However, this two-party colonialist model seems rather limited, for it can obscure the participation of additional players in the equation, dismiss actions of resistance, and conceal the specificity of the cases. In fact, Young's justification over the legitimate nature of the export of Mexican antiquities exposed the conflictive relationship between local governmental authorities and scholars concerning decision-making over the preservation of archaeological monuments in their country of origin, a situation that was seized as an opportunity by the foreign private collector.

Taking general political, academic, artistic and sociological realms into account can help to gain further insight of the historical milieu in which the acquisition of Young's collection took place. As clearly stated by *EMA* catalogue, several Mexican antiquities were gathered during the Mexican-American War, a conflict that has certainly been described not only as the first USA foreign war, but also the point of departure of this nation's expansion North-South, and thus the prelude of its imperialist project in the Americas (Johanssen 1985: 8-10). In fact, it is worth noting that American soldiers invading Mexico not only often saw themselves as replicating Napoleon's invasion of Egypt, but also as 'second conquerors' following the path once traced by Hernán Cortes for the subjugation of the Aztec Empire (Johanssen 1985: 154-157). Almost replicating the Napoleonic army's fascination with ancient Egypt, the American invading forces also shared the romantic longing of their generation and that through such lenses 'Mexico went far in satisfying their fascination for antiquity, remoteness in time; landscape, and the majesty of the picturesque, and for the people of strange and distant places, remoteness, in space' (Johanssen 1985: 154). Thus, like other foreign travellers, American soldiers became aware of the presence of the Mexican Pre-Columbian past, organised side-trips to archaeological ruins, examined the National Museum of Mexico, and obtained antiquities that, according to newspapers, eventually found their way into American Museums (Johanssen 1985: 158-159).

The clearest example of the rage for Mexican Antiquity among American invading forces was the foundation of the 'Aztec Club', a society that was initially established in Mexico City –within a month of its occupation in 1843– and that later held meetings at various notable American residences, including the White House (Σ: AC 2008: 1). The 'Aztec Club', which counted with

notable fellows –e.g. President Ulysses Grant– held various meetings to examine ethnological and archaeological matters about Mexico until the end of the 1800s (Σ: AC 2008: 2).

The American invasion of Mexico also stimulated both academic inquiry and artistic interest in the remains of ancient cultures, particularly the Aztecs. An example of the former was the attention shown by the recently formed American Ethnological Society (AES), whose president, the linguist Albert Gallatin (1761-1849), in spite of its opposition to the war, saw it as advantageous to the field of ethnology (Johanssen 1985: 159). Thus, the AES not only devoted various meetings to the subject –including a paper on the Aztec Calendar by the nation’s leading anthropologist Ephraim Squier (1821-1888)–, but also hosted, in May 1849, the display of casts of Mexican antiquities by the archaeologist Benjamin Norman (1806-1860), author of the well-known travelogue *Rambles in Yucatan* (1843), which included observations on the ruins of Chichen Itza, Kabah, Zayil, and Uxmal (Johanssen 1985: 159). Therefore, it seems this context of war-invasion stimulated the production of displays and other archaeological products in the US during the early 1800s.

Unfortunately, there is no available information about the manner in which the AES’s and Young’s display were designed, executed, or set up. Yet, the catalogue of the latter exhibit gives some clues about its arrangement. It states that at the border, presumably, of the walls of the gallery, there were ornaments designed by George Clarke (1832- 1894), which were ‘copied from vases and from stamps in the collection’ (Young 1855: 64). ‘Two circular objects at the sides [that were] from the impressive cotton fabrics’ were shown in a glass-case with two drawings of weapons at the bottom, which were ‘supposed to represent the Micquanhuil or Aztec Sword’ (Young 1855: 64). Although, no graphic material about this decoration is available, it signals continuity in the development of scenic decorations based on Aztec motifs in early nineteenth-century British exhibitions of Mesoamerica

Nevertheless, *EMA* greatly contrasted with *AM*. In comparison with Bullock’s multi-experience spectacle, the Pall Mall display was rather simple: it presented objects in glass-cases or tables. The 1854 catalogue contrasted with the *AM* guidebook due to the lack of a guiding narrative: it only listed the objects on display –which indicates their ordering–, with a brief interpretative description. It would be misleading to credit the minimal approach of the *EMA* to Young’s inexperience as a showman, for it appears that his intention was to emphasize the academic character of the exhibit (Cf. Altick 1978: 498), an effect that was produced through the combination of three display strategies:

First, the *EMA* used of glass-cases, which –as Lidchi (1997: 171) has suggested– ‘establish distance by placing the object in a more sterile and ordered environment’. This distancing produced the effect of a neutral presentation of the object that was essential for its incorporation into a scientific frame of representation.

Second, by using impersonal language, Young's catalogue emphasised neutrality and thus produced the tone akin to scientific discourse. Following Shanks (1992: 186), such an anonymous agency, as much as the linear and analytical arrangement of this text, showed impersonal powers, all of them characteristics of a white, academic, and Western archaeological narration.

Third, apart from quoting Bullock's travelogue, Young's catalogue incorporated studies of Pre-Columbian cultures that had been published during the previous two decades in the United States and the United Kingdom: Kingsborough's *Antiquities of Mexico* (1831-1848), Norman's *Rambles in Yucatan* (1843), Prescott's *History of the Conquest* (1843), Squier's late work –presumably *The Serpent Symbol* (1843)–, Mayer's *Mexico as it was and it is* (1844) and, Francisco Javier Clavijero's *History of Mexico* (1844). This body of literature informed the rhetoric of the EMA's catalogue: in fact, most of its interpretations were style-free combinations of Clavijero's and Mayer's points of view. In addition, as much as in the case of nineteenth-century Classical Archaeology, Egyptology and, Assyriology, the interpretative framework of the *EMA*, and its credibility heavily relied on written records (see Trigger 1989: 40) and academic prestige. For example, stating the stylistic connections between Mexican, Peruvian, Egyptian and Indian works of art, the catalogue cited the opinions of Bullock and of a collector of Peruvian antiquities, William Beckford, which in Young's (1855: iv) view 'carr[ied] the weight of authority with them'. Yet, Young was not entirely uncritical regarding his sources of information, e.g. the catalogue explained that an animal intended to represent an Iguana, according to Norman (1854 in Young 1855: 24), was more likely 'the Chlamyphorus Truncatus'. However, the *EMA* complemented literary data with material evidence to convey a complex representation of Mesoamerica.

#### 4.3.2. Representation

The *EMA* was neither the 'first' nor 'unique' British display on Mesoamerica at the time of its opening. As will be examined in the following section, the British Museum had presented Mexican antiquities –including Bullock's– in its galleries for a number of years. This situation determined Young's interpretation in a number of important ways.

To begin with, the *EMA* demanded innovation in terms of the exhibition's publicity: the catalogue stated that the collection had been found 'carefully covered by stones, showing that precautions had been taken to preserve the deposits' (Young 1855: 142). Such an approach, which formulated archaeological 'metaphor of discovery' –finding something that was previously unknown– (Shanks 1992: 58), deserves our attention because Young employed it to make a key promotional claim: that none of the previous collections 'was of equal importance' (Young 1855:142)



Second, due to the nature of the collecting process, the *EMA* was able to put forward archaeological interpretations that were based on the association of materials found in the deposit. For example, Young (1855: 22) proposed that an aboriginal skull was ‘supposed to be that of a female individual from the circumstance that it was found with spindles, small cups and “penates”’.

Third, Young’s display made a systematic effort to determine and discriminate the original function of some types of artefacts. For instance, the catalogue stated that the ‘vases are either sacrificial or funeral’, since they sometimes contained human bones and often, fruits and offerings to the dead (Young 1855: iii). It was further proposed that sacrificial vases had been used in the Teocalli or Temples for libations, i.e. to hold water for the priests’ (Young 1855: iii).

Fourth, *EMA* posed iconographic interpretations: certain distinctive elements in the sculptures were compared with the literature. For example, some Aztec deities were identified, and sometimes accompanied by their names in Nahuatl or Spanish language: according to the guidebook (Young 1855: 22) ‘a crouching figure, the face surrounded with rays’ was the God of the Sun, Nahuatrin, a misspell reference to Nanahuatzin, the mythic hero who according to Aztec legends –recorded by Clavijero (1987: 150)– sacrificed himself to become the sun. However, some of Young’s interpretations went further, establishing speculative or free relationships between the artefact’s attributes and their meanings. For instance, the ‘Goddess of the Lakes’ was identified by the presence of a ‘fish around her head’ (Young 1855: 53), a bar or muzzle over the mouth was the identifying feature of ‘the God of Silence’, actually an invention of Mayer (1844: 86).

Five, the display also used labelling to construct his interpretations. Young translated some of the appellations of famous sculptures from the National Museum of Mexico to his own collection for his display catalogue. This is the case of ‘Indio Triste’ and the ‘Perro Mudo’, whose illustration had actually appeared in Mayer’s work (1844: 87).

Six, he *EMA* did not experience the tension between *introducing* the incommensurability of the Aztec society and *demonstrating* its complexity. In fact, this exhibition built on Bullock’s productions and the already mentioned literature on Pre-Columbian Mexico that were inclined to accept that the Aztecs had achieved a considerable state of cultural development. For that reason, the catalogue only described –as a matter of fact and with no further justification– some complex Pre-Columbian cultural traits, such as the use of hieroglyphic writing and the existence of calendar systems (Young 1855: vi). Similarly, it presented a model of a Teocalli or Mexican Temple, which acted as a symbol to represent architectural monumentality. What is here important to take into consideration is that Young’s display pointed to the same cultural traits – and often used the same representational strategies– by which Bullock had previously tried to show the complexity of Aztec culture.

Broader developments in the study of antiquity made an important impact on the *EMA*. Instead of Bullock's 'frozen' picture of the Pre-Columbian past, Young added both time-depth and chronology to his display representation of Aztec history. Time-depth was constructed by direct labelling: a sculpture of a snake was described 'to be of high *antiquity* and considerable rarity' (Young 1855: 33). Indexing and typology also served for the construction of time-categories: according to manufactured materials, the catalogue grouped types the artefacts, which represent three different eras:

The stone-objects are [...] the earliest and probably referable to the Toltec period. Some of the terracottas are long prior, and contemporaneous with the Spanish Conquest; a few are evidently subsequent to that period (Young 1855: iii)

This narrative clearly mirrored the system of relative dating developed by Christian Thomsen, whose three-age model had just been published in England in 1848 (Trigger 1989: 73-78). It seems that this periodisation was made explicit in the actual display, by categorising artefacts: e.g. terracotta figurines were separated from stone tools (Young 1855: iii). However, there were some inconsistencies, since the typology did not entirely follow the ordering given by the periodisation (Trigger 1989: 73-78). Yet, these temporal categorisations were meant to represent different cultures: the Toltec, the Aztec and the Colonial. Therefore, Young also innovated with the construction of 'archaeological cultures' that not only had a material, but also a temporal, correspondence.

Time was not the unique organising principle of the *EMA*. 'Visible morphological features' (Hooper-Greenhill 1992: 135, 188) served to form further categories: vases, representations of reptiles, animals, etc. Thus, this exhibition was less concerned with 'the rare and the exceptional' than Bullock's. In comparison, the *EMA* both embraced a typological approach and developed an embryonic chronology, two of the basic conceptual and methodological components from which scientific archaeological thinking emerged during the early nineteenth century (Schnapp 1996: 302).

Additional differences between Bullock's and Young's displays were rooted in the rationale of the exhibitions. As explained before, *Ancient Mexico* presented a whole narrative about Aztec culture, which was 'quoted with objects' (Shanks & Tilley 1987:47). Young reversed the effect. His rhetoric was more object-based: fragmented interpretations of Aztec culture appeared as additions to the descriptions of the artefacts.

Perhaps due to this direct proximity to the antiquities, the *EMA* seemed more sympathetic to Pre-Columbian aesthetics. We still find negative qualifications in its catalogue, such as 'grotesque' or 'curios', but these contrasted with others that described the objects as 'elegant' or 'beautifully modelled' (Young 1855: 12-31). Moreover, the existence of Aztec art was even

proposed at the display, which proves that the aesthetization of Pre-Columbiana took place before the twentieth century (*contra* Braun 1993).

The *EMA* dominant theme for representation was Aztec religion, and particularly human sacrifices, both of them attractive topics for the targeted public: the Anglican British middle class. The catalogue approached these subjects on the basis of Clavijero's (1731-1787), *History of Mexico* ([1840] 1987: 147), which had proposed that ancient Mexicans had an imperfect idea of an independent and invisible Supreme Being with absolute powers. Young (1855: iv) not only accepted this view but also added that this merciful God had formed heaven and hell, an argument that proposed that Aztec Religion essentially resembled the monotheist Judeo-Christian tradition. In fact, the catalogue asserted that during a historical encounter between Cortes and the Aztec Emperor Moctezuma, the latter had affirmed that 'in regard to the creation of the world, our belief is the same' (Young 1855: v). Young was not alone in producing interpretations consonant with Christian theology. For elaborating on a very old debate on the New World's Dispute (Gerbi 1993), some nineteenth-century intellectuals had framed the Pre-Columbian World within a Biblical framework of history. In fact, sources consulted by Young –particularly, Veytia's and Kingsborough's works– either traced back the origin of the Aztecs to the dispersion of peoples after the falling of the Tower of Babel or proposed that the Toltecs were one of the Lost Tribes of Israel (see Keen 1973: 249).

Another important topic in *EMA* had to do with stressing analogies between Aztec and Indian, Chinese, Celtic, Greek and, Egyptian objects, all of them cultures that formed the archaeological landscape of the mid-nineteenth century (see Trigger 1989: 38-40). We can identify at least three strategies by which the *EMA* tried to establish cultural similitude.

- It pointed to formal similarities, which often resulted in bizarre descriptions of the artefacts: e.g. a figure with 'Hindu influence' was 'similar to a New Zealand mask' (Young 1855: 87).
- It made direct qualification, e.g. 'a standing figure of a female of [...] Egyptian-like character' (Young 1855: 34).
- It used a nomenclature already associated with a given culture. The catalogue mentioned the presence of 'an Isis-like figure', a 'sphinx' and obelisks (Young 1855: 21-24). Notoriously, the majority of the analogies correspond to Egyptian Culture.

*EMA* emphasis on Aztec Religion was transmitted by publicising strategies (ILN 1855, ATN 1855): an advertisement stated that the display illustrated the 'Mythology, Religious Rites [...] of Toltec and Aztec Nations' (ATN 1855: 297). The way in which these topics were interpreted by the exhibit's viewers is matter of discussion of the following section.

### 4.3.3. Interpretation

Two important Victorian periodicals published reviews of the *EMA*: the *Illustrated London News* (ILN 1855a) and *The Athenaeum* (ATN 1855). Apart from textual data, the former offered an illustration of Young's collection (Figure 12), whose arrangement does not correspond with the overall organization and forms of presentation suggested by the catalogue. In fact, this image was more concerned with the artefacts themselves than with the display, which concurred with the object-based approach of the *EMA*.

This illustration of the ILN (1855a) showed more than 15 artefacts in a rather limited space. It distributed them in a pyramidal, thus, symmetric composition and, clearly defined their physical characteristics. The number of artefacts and the lack of space between them suggested abundance, which was one of the main attractions of Young's display. The image also showed the large variability of types of materials presented by the exhibition: sculptures of serpents, idols, animal-shaped figures and the model of the Teocalli. Interesting enough, this illustration depicted a rather large number of artefacts that Young's catalogue related to Aztec Religion, the topic that –as explained above – was central to the display's narrative. This even applied to sculptures representing serpents, turtles and an armadillo, which according to the catalogue 'appear to have occupied some share in [the Aztecs] religious worship' (Young 1855: iii)

The accompanying text of the ILN's image demonstrated that other central ideas of Young's display representation were successfully transmitted to the public.

- It suggested that the monotheist cult of the Aztecs had been corrupted by the introduction of the 'worship of idols, which they propitiated with human sacrifices' (ILN 1855a: 144).
- It drew attention to the description of Mexican 'idols', whose general appearance was considered in rather negative terms. For example, the God of Silence was described as 'personified by a grotesque squatting figure' (ILN 1855a: 144).

The press also underscored the academic character of Young's exhibition. For instance, the (ILN 1855a: 144) expressed the view that 'the scientific world of Class X of the Great Exhibition will find many objects to interest them in the present collection'. *The Athenaeum* (ATN 1855: 297) was even more explicit regarding this issue by stating that 'theorists [...] walk around the raw idols, and to their satisfaction, trace a dear connection between the nation of Moctezuma and the races of Egypt, India, China and even Etruria'. This statement suggests at least three messages. First, that scholars visited the display; the second, that they were somehow surprised by the objects found there; and, the third, that diffusionist interpretations were more accepted, and disseminated, at this time. Furthermore, showing a rather independent view, the reporter even posited a new diffusionist hypothesis: 'that the original Toltecs were not Tartars

nor the Lost Tribes, but Tyrians who fled to a new world when Alexander conquered the old' (ATN 1855: 297). Similarly, the ILN (1855a: 144) referred to 'an idol, which has a remarkable resemblance to the stone sculpture of Egypt: the heavy square-formed headdress being similar to that of various Deities of Thebes'. Thus, by comparing and associating Mexican antiquities with those from many ancient civilisations known at the time, the viewer's of *EMA* proposed object-based interpretations about Mesoamerica that were not explicit in the display. Less than a decade later, a private British entrepreneur attempted a rather different representational framework that consisted of displaying Pre-Columbian objects within an ethnographic display.

### **4.3. THE PARADOXES OF THE ETHNOGRAPHIC FRAMEWORK: HENRY CHRISTY'S PRIVATE EXHIBITION (1862)**

Henry Christy (1810-1865) was not only a famous businessman –director of the London Joint Stock Bank– and an enthusiastic traveller, but also a key intellectual in the history of nineteenth-century British anthropology (Hamson 1885: 286; Wolmer 1965: 1-11, Carmichael 1973: 33-39). A member of many scholarly organizations –including the Geological Society of London–, an active figure in the Prehistoric movement, and part of the young intellectual group that, including Lane Fox (1827-1900) and John Evans (1823-1908), reinvigorated the Ethnological Society between the 1850s and 1860s (TW & TRJ 1865: 286-288), Christy also had an aristocratic interest in collecting, and exhibited prehistoric and ethnographic artefacts from all over the world, including from Mesoamerica, at his home in London. This display constituted a remarkable example of the private collections that were put on view for public, although limited, audience in Europe during the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries (Jenkins 1994:242).

The date of publication of its catalogue (1862), whose publication was supervised by E. Tylor (1832-1917) –then a young man who was trying to establish his reputation as student of human origins– gives us an approximate date for the opening of the display. However, considering that Christy's collecting activities went back to the 1850's, it is possible that he had shown some of the artefacts in previous years. In any case, it is the 1862 display that deserves our attention, not only because its catalogue provides information about its production and its representational framework, but also because, the descriptions of some of the objects presented in Christy's display demonstrate that significant changes took place in the aesthetic valuation of Pre-Columbian material culture during the second half of the nineteenth century.

#### **4.3.1. Production**

To our contemporary eyes, the production of Christy's 1862 display (hereafter *HCD*) may seem uncomplicated, as conventional might appear its result. According to its catalogue (Steinhauer

1862), the exhibition basically consisted of cases organised in a rather dense arrangement: one thousand and eighty five specimens were grouped in one room the size of a typical Victorian drawing room (Wolmer 1965: 11). Graphic representation of the display is yet to be found. However, both the exhibit's basic infrastructure and its jam-packed organisation may suggest today's prejudiced idea of the nineteenth-century museum (Shelton 1994: 11).

Indeed, retrospective evaluations of past exhibitions, if not well informed, can lead to negative judgements regarding their complexity and their achievements. However, as some historians have recently proved, the Victorian Era witnessed major shifts in the nature of exhibitions. In contrast to early nineteenth-century private collections that were characterised by their fragmented and miscellaneous nature, emerging museums in the late nineteenth century 'functioned to sort the world systematically into drawers, glass-fronted cases, bottles, and filing cabinets' (Jenkins 1994: 242). In particular, it seems that the use of cases was essential for the creation of new relations of space and vision, for they allowed not merely 'a clear inspection of objects exhibited, but also [...] for the visitors to be the objects of each other's inspection' (Bennett 1998: 52). The development of such a technology of regulation, along with the rise of museums whose space of representation was shaped by the relations between an array of disciplines (including anthropology and archaeology) has been considered a critical step in the formation of the nineteenth-century 'exhibitionary complex' (Bennett 1998: 75). By using cases and concentrating mainly on ethnographic artefacts, the *HCD* appears not only to have responded to such historical changes, but also to have been a pioneer in the history of museums.

Two further aspects distinguished Christy's exhibition from its predecessors and many of its contemporaries:

- It contained the most impressive, and perhaps the richest collection of Mexican antiquities of its time.
- Its curator was C. L. Steinhauer (1816-1897) (for a biography see NMDSF ND: 67-68), who was the former assistant of C.J. Thomsen (1788-1865), the archaeologist responsible for the first practical application of the famous 'Three-Age System' at what became the National Museum of Denmark (Trigger 1989; 78-79). Moreover, being the inspector of the Ethnographic Section of that museum, he had developed, on the basis of Thomsen's system, a method for arranging its collections, which followed the principles of a 'cultural-historical approach' (NMDSF ND: 11-14).

Christy's collection had grown considerably by 1862, reaching the number of more than 1085 objects from all over the world (Steinhauer 1862). No less than 602 of these were listed as Mexican (Steinhauer 1862), which reflected the collector's affection for Pre-Columbian antiquities. Christy acquired some of these during his 1856 trip to Mexico. Tylor, his travelling

companion, recorded some details of the collecting process. Whereas a number of the small stone-artefacts (mainly obsidian knives, arrows-heads and spearheads) were obtained directly from the ground (Tylor 1862: 96), other antiquities were purchased at Tlatelolco and Teotihuacan, communities of Pre-Columbian origin (Tylor 1862: 101, 138, 148, 235). Collecting by purchase proceeded in the open, and even on a rather large scale: Tylor (1862: 235) recorded that after announcing their interest in obtaining antiquities at Cholula, the local population mounted an improvised market where they obtained various Pre-Columbian figurines.

It has been generally acknowledged that the Great Exhibition of 1851 was a powerful influence on Christy's collecting activities (Braunholtz 1953: 90-93; Auerbach 1991: 159-193). However, Caygill & Cherry (1997: 38) have alternatively argued that the intellectual genesis of Christy's collection had a crucial moment during his Mexican venture. Indeed, Christy had already amassed a collection of Pre-Columbian antiquities before his trip to Mexico (Tylor 1862: 95). However, this country offered great opportunities for the English aristocrat to enlarge his holdings with sculptures, a large number of terracotta figurines, ceramic pipes and, particularly, with stone implements (Tylor 1862: 95-97). The latter acquisitions seem telling of Christy's embryonic interest in artefacts associated with the origins of humankind, a topic that became central to his intellectual efforts in the later years of his life (Σ-ODNB: 2008: 1 101005375).

We cannot dismiss Tylor's impact on Christy's approximation to the Mexican Pre-Columbian past: acquainted with Humboldt's and Prescott's works, Tylor (1862: 40-44) had a 'well defined idea' of the Mexico of Moctezuma. The influence of the Prussian intellectual on Christy's collecting preferences was also more than evident: he obtained a squatting female figurine 'like the one in black basalt in Humboldt's *Vues*, and there called [...] Aztec Priestess' (Tylor 1862: 235). Furthermore, Christy's and Tylor's exploration of Mexico –as much as Bullock's– very much followed in the steps of Humboldt: apart from exploring mines, they toured the archaeological sites of Otumba, Teotihuacan and Cholula, always making references to the observations published in Humboldt's *Vues* (Tylor 1862: 141). They also examined the Aztec Calendar, as much as the Coatlicue and the Sacrificial Stone at the Museo Nacional de México, an institution was then occupied by the Mexican Army (Tylor 1862: 222-223). At this institution, the English travellers witnessed both the disregard of the soldiers for the Pre-Columbian antiquities situated out-doors and the efforts of the curators to preserve those located in the in-doors galleries, a conflict that certainly expressed the political instability of Mexico at the time (Zavala 1999: 86-87).

It is noteworthy that Tylor (Zavala 1999: 80-87, 233) –who constantly described Mexican Indians as drunks, lazy, dishonest, ignorant, and generally disrespectful to the remains of the Pre-Columbian antiquity– extended this criticism to the guards at the Museo Nacional de México, affirming that they had sold part of the institutional holdings. Such condemnation appears rather contradictory to our eyes, for the foreigners were also acquiring Mesoamerican

artefacts for exportation, an action that was then considered illegal by virtue the Mexican legislation of 1827 (Morales-Moreno 1994b: 37).

We do not know how many artefacts Christy acquired in Mexico and how he managed to transport them to England. Nevertheless, by the 1860's, his Mexican collection had additionally grown due to transactions with dealers, other collectors (including donations and exchanges with his friend Lane Fox) travellers, and museums (Chapman 1985: 25-27). Christy exercised a rather aggressive approach to collecting, which ensured the acquisition of Pre-Columbian artefacts that were exceptional and unique: three magnificent objects inlaid with mosaics of turquoise of Mexican origin that he purchased at a public auction during 1859 (Figure 14).

Figure 14. Turquoise mosaic mask  
acquired by Christy in 1859  
(From McEwan 1994: 75)

Interestingly enough, during the process of acquisition, the British collector had made inquiries about the origin of these objects, their history and their condition to its then proprietor, B. Hertz, a member of the Archaeological Institute at Rome (Chapman 1985: 37; N&Q 1858). Thanks to this and additional written evidence, we can infer that Mexican antiquities were accessible to mid nineteenth-century British collectors through five different venues: auction houses (e.g. Sotheby & Wilkinson), which in turn sold collections from private museums trying to overcome financial difficulties (e.g. John Mayer's Egyptian Museum, Liverpool), private European collectors (e.g. Hertz from Frankfurt), Antique shops (e.g. Mr Pratts' Shop, London), and older Continental collections. In fact, Hertz wrote that the Mexican objects inlaid with turquoise proceeded from Bruges, Venice and Florence (Chapman 1985: 27), a fact later confirmed by Tylor (1862: 339), who was also the first to point out their association with *Aldrovandus Museum Metallicum*, which had been located in Bologna during the 1600's (Cf. Olmi 1985:13-15). The attributed origins of these artefacts were historically plausible since many eighteenth-century cultural institutions had been affected by the political turmoil and economic problems that Italy and the Low Countries experienced during the first half of the nineteenth century (Hearder & Morris 2002: 153-187).

Only recently the influence of Steinhauer on nineteenth-century British ethnographic museums has been recognised (Shelton 2000: 223). In particular, it has been documented that some Victorian curators adopted his method of arranging collections, which built on Thomsen's tripartite classification, but further developed simple chronologies (Shelton 2007: 69). However, since Steinhauer had a direct involvement in the *HCD*, we can distinguish in it the working details of his curatorship. In fact, it seems likely that Steinhauer, an old acquaintance of Christy (Caygill & Cherry 1997: 8), went to London to supervise the set-up of the display, since at the



time Denmark was at war and, thus financial problems and lack of authority were affecting the development of the Danish National Museum (Derry 1979: 63).

The *HCE* has been traditionally regarded as a paradigmatic example of the 'geographical system' (Lane Fox 1874a: xiii; Chapman 1981: 145-146), a scheme developed by the Prussian physician F. von Siebold (1796-1866) in response to former classificatory schemes based either on 'artefact function' (Shelton 2007: 66) or 'typology' (Chapman 1981: 212, 628). The 'geographical system' consisted in classifying objects according to their place of origin and was at the time the model of presentation of many ethnographic museums in Europe (e.g. the British Museum, the Volkerkunde in Leiden) (Chapman 1985: 25). According to Siebold (1843 in Chapman 1985: 24), this system aimed to 'give the best impression of "peoples" relative progress, [including] the condition of their arts [...] and the nature of past exchanges with other peoples'. Therefore, although the rationale of the 'geographical system' was essentially comparative, it was also aligned with diffusionist theories, and more important, it expressed a progressive view of time (see Chapter 3).

Following Bennett (1998: 77) the 'rhetoric of progress' was a key contribution of anthropology, since it became the central ideological discursive formation of the nineteenth-century 'exhibitionary complex'. This rhetoric also played a crucial role in the elaboration of discourses of alterity, since the idea of progress connected

'the histories of Western nations and civilisations to those of Others, but only by separating the two, in providing for an interrupted continuity in the order of peoples [...], one in which "primitive peoples" dropped out of history altogether in order to occupy a twilight zone between nature and culture' (Bennett 1998: 17).

Siebold's principles, as much as the ideological connection between the idea of the 'Other' and that of the 'Primitive', were followed for the production of the *HCD*, as three particular manifestations showed:

First, as explained in Chapter 3, many nineteenth-century scholars considered *contemporary* 'Others' as their primitive *ancestors* (Bowler 1989: 11). The arrangement of *HCE* clearly structured this relation exhibiting both ethnographic and prehistoric artefacts in the same space.

Second, even though the *HCD* did organise objects according to localities, the ethnographic area was further divided in terms of groupings defined as 'Nations'. This categorisation not only responded to a long-standing interest in tracing ethnic identity to material culture (Trigger 1994: 163), it also reflected an embryonic 'archaeological approach' since it defined cultures by representative samples of their material remains, a theoretical development that was later fully developed by G. Childe (1893-1957) in the 1920s (Trigger 2006: 299-300), who stated that:

We find certain types of remains –pots, implements, ornaments, burial rites and house forms– constantly recurring together. Such a complex of associated traits we shall call a "cultural group"

or just a ‘culture’. We assume that such a complex is the material expression of what today we would call a “people” (Childe 1929: v-vi).

It is noteworthy, however, that whereas Childe’s characterisation was dependent on the archaeological record and its linguistic, symbolic, ethnographic and archaeological context (Childe 1956: 15-16), in the *HCD* arrangement such contextual categorizations were deemed irrelevant. But, in spite of this dissimilarity, the former display –as much as Childe’s ‘Cultural Historical Approach’– appears to emphasise the ‘people behind the object’, thus representing a collection of different peoples. Such a perspective facilitated the use of the comparative method: a common methodological tool for both prehistoric and ethnological studies in the 1860’s and 1870’s (Stocking 1987: 15). The basic premise of the comparative method was that in the absence of historical evidence, earlier phases could be reconstructed on the basis of peoples living at earlier stages of development (Stocking 1987: 147-169). In this sense, for many nineteenth-century scholars, the contemporary material culture of the non-European world could be employed to substantiate the material finds of prehistoric Europe (Caygill & Cherry 1997: 11). Such a rationale lay behind the relationship between ethnology and prehistory established by the *HCD*.

Third, as explained in Chapter 3, nineteenth-century academic discourses established a subtle connection between the comparative method and the Western ideological bias by which the valuation of non-Western creations was entangled within asymmetrical power relationships. Regarding this issue, it is worth considering Stocking’s view (1985a: 58) on the role played by museums, for he states that the expropriation of ‘objects from actors in a particular space, time and, meaning and the appropriation of observers in another’ reflected an implicit relation of power.

The *HCD* further articulated this dynamic of power: ethnographic objects were not interpreted in terms of the meaning given by their producers, but they were rather inserted in a discourse crafted by Western scholars, a subject that will be explained in the following section.

#### **4.3.2. Representation**

The representation of time in the *HCD* can be better described as resulting from a process of annihilation: the display framed ethnographic objects into a homogenous discourse that lacked a temporal component since neither was data given regarding the dating of the artefacts, nor was information provided in relation to the historical development of the cultures presented by the exhibition. By annihilating the function of time, this display ‘fossilised’ ethnographic cultures, an operation that implicitly denied both their capacity for transformation and their coevalness with nineteenth-century Western culture (Fabian 1983: 32; Russell 1997). According to Fabian (1983: 148-149) this conceptual process of *allochronism* amounted to a strategy ‘towards the end of

keeping anthropology's "Other" in another time'. It can be further argued that *allochronism* actually extracted the variable of transformation from the operation of timing. Such an operation did not lack political connotations. Following Clifford (1986: 101-2), this 'pervasive tendency to prefigure "Others" in a temporally distinct, but locatable, space' served to reinforce an axis of distinction in relation to the assumed progress of Western history.

The acceptance of allochronism grew stronger from the mid-1800s onwards due to the collusion of anthropology with imperialism, which derived from an inclination in nineteenth-century anthropological discourse to speak of the culturally strange by 'employing terms such as savage, primitive, tribal or traditional' (Fabian 1983: 7). The *HCD* was a climactic example of the articulation of *allochronism* through the use of technologies of display. As it was explained above, non-Western cultures were depicted as insular, a-historical, and incapable of change (Shelton 1994: 14). Furthermore, the catalogue claimed that the head of an idol 'signified his *primitive shape*' (Steinhauer 1862: 36, *my italics*).

However, within the representational framework of 'ethnography', the treatment of the Pre-Columbian collection appeared paradoxical for a number of reasons:

- It did incorporate temporal criteria. The artefacts were labelled as Mexican *Antiquities* (*my italics*). In fact, Hertz's catalogue (1851: 1) had already established semantic recognition regarding the ancient origin of the Mexican artefacts, which were further associated with Assyrian, Babylonian, Egyptian and Greek productions. Furthermore, chronology was articulated by separating the collection into two temporal units: Ancient Mexico and Modern Mexico, a division that, as explained in section 4.1, was a conventional formula for temporising in qualitative terms. This time classification also echoed the title of Tylor's travel narrative about his and Christy's adventures in Mexico: *Anahuac: Mexico and the Mexicans, Ancient and Modern* (1862), a work that had been published the year before the publication of Steinhauer's catalogue.
- The labelling of the antiquities involved the recognition of cultural diversity, a characteristic that is often obscured in colonialist ethnographic displays (Russell 1997). Indeed, the catalogue registered both Aztec objects as well as artefacts 'presumably from Palenque' (Steinhauer 1862: 13), an archaeological site in Chiapas that at those times had already left a mark on Western imagination, thanks to J. Stephens and C. Catherwood's works (1841, 1844), a series that had already achieved several reprints in the United Kingdom at the time.
- The collection was organised in four topics: 'Religion', 'The People', 'War-Weapons', 'Implements used in Hunting', and 'The House'. Following the Foucauldian Modern Episteme, these divisions were made of 'organising structures, that is, of internal relations between elements whose totality forms a function' (Foucault 1972: 132).

Thus, by presenting tools and implements related to domestic activities under the heading of ‘The House’, the *HCD* articulated an embryonic functionalist approach to its representation of Mesoamerica.

All the above variables of organisation meant that Siebold’s ‘geographical system’ was enriched, if not surmounted, by Steinhauer’s curatorship with the introduction of new parameters of representation. Among these, the *HCD* employed new media for the display representation. This can be better appreciated if we consider the way in which Pre-Columbian material culture was previously approached. As explained above, Bullock’s treatment of individual objects, such as the Mexican Calendar and the Coatlicue resulted in the expression of a judgement: of admiration or rejection regarding their aesthetic characteristics. Comparatively, Young concentrated on the recognition of iconographic elements for the building of interpretations. In this case, aesthetical judgements were still proposed, but they began to be dominated by the impartiality of the scientific language. The *HCD* completed the process using three representational technologies that constructed the effect of an objective or ‘naturalised’ narrative’:

- Presentation of verifiable physical information: the catalogue stated the measurement of objects and their material.
- Description of artefacts by an authoritative register: this produced ‘straightforward’ interpretations, which inherently refused questioning. Thus, a ‘sacrificial knife’ was a sacrificial knife, an Idol ‘*was* the God of War and it *was* represented [...] under many different shapes’ (Steinhauer 1862: 36, *my italics*). The lack of quotations and words such as ‘perhaps’, ‘apparently’, etc. bore witness to the new self-confidence of empiricism in social science. It also confirmed the value of studying material remains for their own sake in order to gather new historical information.
- Consistent centrality in the analysis of material culture: this archaeological outlook produced fresh interpretations, e.g. in comparison with Bullock’s and Young’s exhibitions, the *HCE* did not always relate the use of knives to sacrificial practices, but sometimes associated them with domestic activities (Steinhauer 1862: 36). This confirms Moser’s (1998) *avant-garde* idea that exhibitions do not only reflect archaeological knowledge, but they actually produce it.
- Construction of a scientific narrative: this consisted of devising a new language ruled by specific grammatical conventions. For instance, the catalogue described the artefacts using a homogenous taxonomy; stated their formal characteristics, and stressed the particularities of certain individual artefacts. A scientific ‘vocabulary’ was also introduced in the interpretations. For example, Aztec religion was described as a mixture of *monotheism* and *polytheism*, without elaborating on the meaning of the terms

(Steinhauer 1862: 33, *my italics*). Interpretations were presented as being the result of a “transparent” and “unquestionable” logic: due to the superstitious nature of the Aztecs –the catalogue stated–, it was ‘very *natural* those amulets had been in common use’ (Steinhauer 1862: 32).

- Lack of value judgements for describing artefacts. Whereas Hertz (1851: 125) had described a Mexican mask as having ‘an aspect very hideous and terror inspiring’, the *HCE* catalogue maintained a more neutral position in the description of the same artefact. Furthermore, generally speaking, Mexican antiquities were neither labelled as ‘curios’, ‘grotesque’ or ‘horrible’ nor were described as “beauties”. Following Williams (1993: 133), the eradication of wonder and appreciation from the arena of the ethnographic display was further supported by the ‘geographical system’, since it encouraged a scientific appreciation of the ethnographic material.
- Construction of the display’s authority by formulating a narrative that intended to instruct the general public, a characteristic of many nineteenth-century museums (Jenkins 1994: 242-249; Bennett 1998: 17-23). Due to this tendency, a main preoccupation of the times was to reflect a clear rationale in the subject of the exhibitions: museums of Natural History generally attempted to show the dynamics, organization and evolution of nature, whereas questions regarding aesthetic issues were addressed in Museums of Art (Williams 1985: 147). However, as Williams (1985: 147) has explained: ‘the place of ethnographic displays in this scheme of things was not wholly clear. Some ethnographers argued that their materials had nothing to do with the beauty about them and that ethnography collections were intended only to enlighten’. This partially explains why the ‘ethnographic museum and the art museum developed different modes of classification’ (Clifford 1985: 242). In the former, objects were often arranged with other artefacts of similar form or function in order to form typological series of representative samples (Vogel 1988: 13). This rationale was by large followed by Christy’s ethnographic exhibition, by the formation of groups of wedges, hammers, knives, etc. (Steinhauer 1862: 44-45).

However, the position of some Mexican antiquities in Christy’s display appears inherently problematic in this display rationale. On the one hand, the catalogue mentioned the existence of ‘works of art’ within the display (Steinhauer 1862: 2), a category that was usually absent from the ethnographic (and prehistoric) realm, since both in Europe and North America, the ‘almost universally held definition of art excluded non-naturalistic traditions’ (Vogel 1988: 13).

Indirect evidence points towards the hypothesis that the categorisation of ‘art’ might have referred to the three magnificent Pre-Columbian objects inlaid with mosaics of turquoise that Christy acquired in 1852, due to the following reasons:

First, the *HCE* catalogue shows a different valuation between the three Mexican artefacts with inlaid turquoise and the rest of the collection. Indeed, these objects were physically detached from the standard norms of seriation and representativeness that characterised the ethnographic display. Rather they occupied a separate and prominent space in the exhibition, which stressed their individuality, their originality and their aesthetic traits, strategies that have conventionally employed by the representational framework of Art Museums (Vogel 1988: 13).

Second, Christy's contemporaries considered these Mexican artefacts not only as rare, but also as unique (Hertz 1851: 156; Tylor 1862: 110, 337). Hertz (1851: 156) had pointed out that 'there [was] no record in any Catalogue of the great public museums that such monuments of the ancient Mexican people [were] in existence'. Furthermore, Tylor (1862: 337-339) recognised the technical complexity of these artefacts, the richness of their components, and their exceptional appearance, devoting a whole chapter of his book to examine their characteristics and to prove that they were of Aztec origin. Such a valuation actually expressed on economic terms: for records indicate that they were amongst the most expensive purchases of Hertz's 1851 auction, which included precious Egyptian, Greek and Persian antiquities (Gerhard 1859: 126).

No records exist regarding Christy's or Steinhauer's opinions about the aesthetic valuation of such artefacts. However, we can suppose that these were not very far from Tylor's (1862: 235), who described them as 'the finest specimens of Aztec decorative *art*, which exist in the world' (*my emphasis*). The young anthropologist had indeed a rather positive opinion regarding the cultural complexity of the Aztecs. For he not only recognised the '*extraordinary degree of culture* which distinguished [the inhabitants of Mexico] when Europeans first became aware of their existence', but he also referred to the 'land of Aztec *civilisation*' (Tylor 1862: 103, 35, *my italics*). Furthermore, his travel narrative about Mexico recorded some of the complex cultural traits of the Aztecs, including artistic production of knives, the former existence of beautiful Pre-Columbian cities and pyramids, and the preservation of picture-writing, monumental sculpture, astrological charts and calendar systems (Tylor 1862: 41, 95, 97, 101, 235). Notably, Tylor (1862: 230-234) seemed to suggest that the Aztecs occupied a middle stage of development. This was done initially by pointing to the presence of Pre-Columbian bronze artefacts in Christy's collection, and further explaining that such metallurgical technology 'had disappeared along with the fabrication of stone artefacts when iron had come after the Conquest', an argument that clearly echoed Thomsen's three age system. Additionally, with regards to the mask with incrustations of turquoise and obsidian, he explicitly stated that:

The mixture of art, civilisation and barbarism which the hideous aspect of this green and black skull-mask presents accords with the conditions of Mexico at the time of the conquest, under which human sacrifices on a gigantic scale were coincident with much refined in arts and manners (Tylor 1862: 338)

Tylor's conflicting opinion regarding Aztec culture appears to run parallel to the large element

of ambiguity in which the Mexican collection coexisted within *HCE*. This ambiguity concerned the possibility of recognising what seemed “impossible” for the European intellectual canons of the time: the existence of art and civilisation amongst non-Western Cultures. In this sense, *HCE* might have been the first European exhibition to highlight the aesthetic interest of Pre-Columbiana, an attribute that has been conventionally ascribed to the *Trocadero* display that took place in 1928 at the Louvre (Williams 1985: 146).

#### 4.3.3. Interpretation

Unfortunately, no records have been found regarding the audience’s response to *HCE*, a circumstance that effectively limits its historical understanding. The reason for this lack of information is difficult to discern. Nevertheless, the fact that the exhibition was held within private premises points to limitations to its access, including that of the general public and the press.

Yet, it is still possible to put forward some working hypotheses regarding the response to Christy’s display. As explained above, the overall representation of Christy’s display was material based. Interpretations were built upon (or referred to) the observation of physical traits. In this sense, the exhibition reflected the predominance of visualising in the process of knowledge production, as much as the fascination with the visual, which has been a key feature of modernism (Mirzoeff 1998b: 5). The effect of this, at least theoretically speaking, was two-fold. On the one hand, the gaze was constructed as the apparatus of investigation and verification. On the other hand, it was this kind of looking that ‘sanctioned and legitimised scientific imperatives’ (Rogoff 1998: 20).

The above approach has an inherent characteristic: it demanded spectatorship, and thus implied the problematic issue of reading material culture, an operation that was heavily dependent on the ‘visual literacy’ of the display’s viewers (Rogoff 1998: 20). However, Christy’s display was not self-explanatory. No data indicates that labels accompanied the artefacts. The language of the catalogue was rather academic. Thus, it can be concluded that these representational technology did not aim to translate academic knowledge into an accessible language for the general public, as Bullock’s and Young’s had previously tried to. As much as its proprietor, Christy’s display was in essence aristocratic and elitist, rather than instructive for the people. Perhaps, this was the reason why Lane Fox tended to argue that Christy had adopted a more conventional system, which contrasted with his “Typological System” and his interest in establishing a truly popular and educational museum’ (Chapman 1985: 37-38).

Bullock’s, Young’s and Christy’s displays show the relevance of private initiatives for the development of archaeological representations of the past. Comparative research between these private exhibitions with those produced in institutional locales can deep our understanding of

the history of displaying practices. In order to fulfil this aim, the following section examines the representation of Mesoamerica at one of most important Universal Museums of both the nineteenth century and today: the British Museum.

#### **4.5. A PROBLEMATIC COLLECTION: MESOAMERICA IN THE BRITISH MUSEUM (1828-1870)**

From 1828 to 1870, the British Museum (hereafter *BM*), an institution founded in 1753, exhibited several Mesoamerican collections, including those of Bullock, Young and Christy. Through such a long period of time, such holdings were displayed in multiple forms, which permit us to examine the shifts in production, representation and interpretation once objects were incorporated in this massive and highly institutionalised arena.

During these years, the Mesoamerican collection was mainly located within Ethnography. The origins of the ethnographic section of the *BM* can be traced to the section of ‘Miscellanea’ of the nuclear cabinet of curiosities of Sir Hans Sloane. Through its history, ethnography became a sort of ‘residual’ section of the *BM*, which was attached to various uneasy partnerships. It originally belonged to the Department of Natural and Artificial Curiosities (1753-1836), in which it stayed, whereas other specific collections were gradually separated through the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries. By 1836, ethnography was incorporated into the newly founded Department of Antiquities. However, it seems that a proper ethnological gallery was not established until 1845. By 1861, the Department of Antiquities was divided into three sections: Greek and Roman; Medieval, and Oriental. In 1866, Ethnography was incorporated within the latter section and put under charge of its most influential curator: Augustus Franks –a friend of both Fox and Christy–, who was determinant for the destiny of the Mesoamerican displays (Miller 1973: 99, Chapman 1981: 174, Caygill 1996: 68).

From the 1820s to the 1870s, Ethnography by and large suffered as an area of little prestige. Not only was it described as a mere ‘curiosity’ (Miller 1973: 99) but also as a ‘rag and bone department’ (Lane Fox 1891: 227 in Chapman 1985: 27). Disregard was more evident in most of the Museum’s *Guides* and *Synopses*, which became key for visitors after 1810, since personal guides were no longer used after that date (Moser 2006: 110). In these texts, ethnography not only occupied their last pages, but also was presented as the final stage of the proposed trajectories for visitors. Furthermore, in these documents the *BM* did not convey a complete ‘picture’ of the Pre-Columbian cultures, but rather presented an archetypical narrative that just mentioned the number of cases occupied by the objects and a straightforward identification of them. Guidebooks did not offer any basic information about the cultural characteristics of their producers. This contrasted with the treatment given to the Egyptian and Greek collections, which offered summaries of the historic developments of their cultures, their major historical



figures and characteristics. In addition, schematic plans of the *BM* from 1759 onwards indicate that the Ethnographic gallery was provided with a rather small and unimportant location in the Museum (Figure 14).

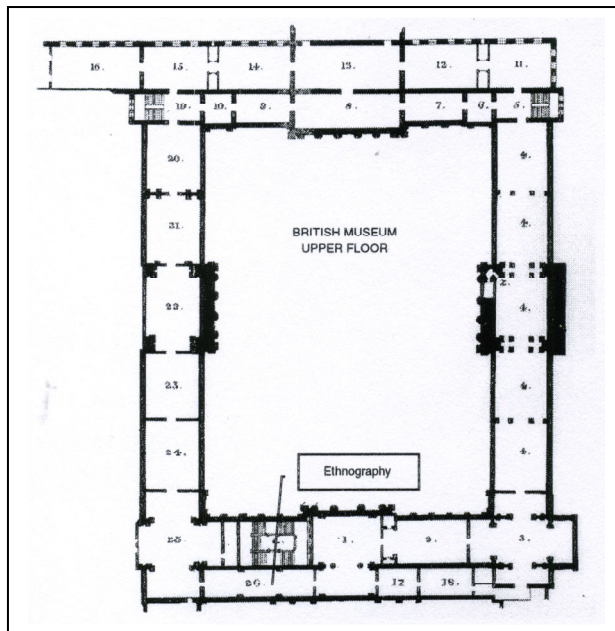


Figure 14. Location of the Ethnographical Room in the British Museum *circa* 1850s (From BM 1852)

Previous histories of the *BM* have recorded some information about the development of the Ethnographic section, including its Mesoamerican collection (Braunholtz 1953; Miller 1973; Chapman 1981, 1985; Caygill 1996; Jenkins 1992; Coombes 1994, 1996; King 1997). However, both these sources and administrative records reveal considerably scarcer information about the history, arrangement, management of the ethnographic gallery than, for example, of the Egyptian galleries (Moser 2006). Data about the display's space, structure, distribution, layout, design –which was determinant

for Moser's study of the history of the Egyptian collection at the *BM*–, does not exist for Ethnography. Although these circumstances certainly limit our understanding about the history of Ethnography at the *BM*, it is still possible to present a working template. This shows the unique development that the acquisition and display of Mesoamerican collections experienced in the *BM* during the nineteenth century.

#### 4.5.1. Production

The origins of the Mesoamerican collection at the *BM* can be traced back to the very foundational nucleus of this institution. For according to King (1994: 234-236), Sloane's collection encompassed five Pre-Columbian artefacts. However, during the first sixty years of existence of the *BM*, very few Mexican antiquities were accessioned, all through private donation, including 'a cup and a dagger that supposed to belong to Moctezuma' (BMR 1757-1878: 6) a series of 'earthen images and a jar' presumably from Sacrificios Island, Veracruz, Mexico (BMR: 1757-1878: 9; Bernal 1980: 132).

The most important contribution to the *BM* Pre-Columbian collection in the early nineteenth century can be traced back to 1825, when it acquired at least 54 objects from Bullock's collection, including the sculptures of the *Xuibcoatl*, *Chalchitlicue*, and *Quetzalcoatl*. The details of

this deal have been explained elsewhere (Medina González 1998: 69-70). However, it is noteworthy that the *BM* initially refused to acquire Bullock's collection and when this actually finally took place, the official accession did not occur for almost two months (BML 1825: 2082).

Taking the above data into account, we can conclude that during the 1820s the *BM* Trustees were not especially enthusiastic about enlarging its Pre-Columbian holdings. As much as with the case of the Egyptian antiquities, there was little need to initiate an acquisition programme and therefore, the Trustees acted according to opportunity, rather than as result of scholarly interest (Moser 2006: 67, 129).

This policy continued during the 1830s and the 1840s, a period during which the Trustees largely disregarded the ethnographic collection. Indeed, as Miller (1973:221-22) argued, to many of the Board, spending 'good money on anything but classical statuary was still an anathema'. During these decades, the *BM* declined purchasing some Mexican antiquities, including some manuscripts and drawings (BMA 1754-1857: 3092, 3535, 3697, 5158; 5275). Nevertheless, it acquired large sets of Pre-Columbian objects from private collectors mainly by donation and exchange (see Appendix 2). The donors were a mixture of navy officers, colonial officers, aristocrats and members of the Church.

Some of the objects had been originally acquired by primary collecting, a process whose details remain obscure. The exception is Nepean's collection, whose *Inventory* (Anon 1844) states that the artefacts had been directly excavated from a structure on Sacrificios Island, Veracruz (BMA 1754-1857: 571).

Sources of secondary collecting consisted of collectors and professionals of different nationalities living at England and Europe. Details of the collecting processes, although scarce, are enlightening. Donations proceeded faster than purchases, whose finalisation could last up to two years (BMED 1849: 1557, 5728, 5730, 5732). For the latter, the *BM* sent keepers and assistant keepers to examine the collections, who produced a report, presented drawings of the objects and offered an opinion regarding the convenience of the acquisition (BMED 1843: 6334, BMM 38: 9.1. 1840-5.12 1844). The final word on the accessions remained in the Trustees' power (BMA 1754-1857: 8824), but the keepers –who were responsible for carrying out the purchases– could ask for an extension of funds (BMA 1754-1857: 8830). Therefore, acquisitions were dependent on a fine balance of decision-making between the museum's authorities and curators (*contra* Moser 2006: 208).

Considering the above, it is understandable that Hill-Boone (1993b: 2) has argued that a considerable portion of the nineteenth-century British collecting of Mesoamerican antiquities depended on the private sector. However, as Jenkins (1992: 221) has documented, by the 1850s the *BM* did make moves towards obtaining a representative collection of antiquities from Central America. Various historians (Blom 1936; Von Hagen 1973; Miller 1973; Graham 2002)

have long made reference to the last initiative, which actually never progressed beyond paper proposals. However, recent detailed research by Aguirre (2005: 61-101) has revealed that the operation, which lasted from 1841 to 1855, basically sought the acquisition of 'specimens of sculpture' from the archaeological sites of Quirigua and Copan (Honduras) and Tikal (Guatemala). Although more information about this plan will be examined in Chapter 5, here two issues will be addressed.

The first is that despite this scheme –or more precisely due to its failure– we cannot conclude that nineteenth-century British collecting of Pre-Columbiana *relied* on the 'vast administrative machinery' of 'British informal imperialism' (*my italics, contra* Aguirre 2005: 69). In fact, only in one particular instance, –that corresponding to the 1857 donation of several antiquities from Guatemala and Belize by the Superintendent of Honduras–, were colonial officers involved in the growth of the Mesoamerican collections of the *BM* (see BMR 1757-1878: 207-211). Furthermore, neither can we conclude that the 'British Museum's mid-century interest in the ruins of Copan, Quirigua and Tikal partook of a broader shift in British antiquarian attention from the Aztecs to the Maya, corresponding in turn to a shift in territorial interest from Mexico to Central America' (Aguirre 2005: 71). This is due to two important reasons. On the one hand, there is no evidence that at the time the *BM* discriminated between Mexican and Mayan antiquities, simply because the latter had not even yet been recognised as 'Mayan' or as belonging to a different cultural group to Aztecs. On the other hand, archival resources show that the *BM* continued to collect antiquities both from Mexico and Central America without major distinctions in terms of quantity or economic worth.

Second, during the 1860s –the period when major anthropological collections were established worldwide (Stocking 1985a: 7)–, the *BM* experienced important changes in its ethnographic section. This is reflected not only in a notable increase, but also a dramatic shift in its collecting practices regarding Mesoamerican material. Such transformations can be associated with a series of historical events. In 1851 Franks (1826- 1897) was appointed as assistant keeper of the Department of Antiquities, with special responsibility for British, Medieval and Ethnographic collections. He made a substantial contribution to the growth of the latter, which on his arrival consisted only of 3,700 artefacts and when he retired in 1896 had reached more than 38,000 items (King 1997: 136-137). It is difficult to ascertain how many of these artefacts actually derived from Mesoamerica. However, the Appendix 2 (which summarises much of the information hitherto recovered from scholarly literature and the different archival records, registries and cupboards of the ethnographic section of the *BM*) shows that a large part of the Pre-Columbian series proceeded from donations from different sources: private collectors, museums, travellers, and navy officials from diverse European countries. It is worth of attention that prominent Mexican figures also presented Mexican antiquities to the *BM*, a data that confirms that the process of 'symbiotic transculturation' also operated within the institutional

arena. King (1997: 136-137) has argued that Franks engineered many of these bequests through friendship, a condition that was of particular importance for the acquisition of the more than 10,000 artefacts that formed Christy's collection. However, Franks' private economic means and his academic affiliations also guaranteed the success of some of the accessions. In addition, he sought for the accession of ethnographic materials through exchange and dissemination of copies with other European and American Museums.

Due to Frank's insistence and ultimately under his direction, the Department of British and Medieval Antiquities and Ethnography was ultimately established as a separate operative entity in 1866, a condition that persisted during the rest of the nineteenth century (Caygill 1996: 68). Such administrative independence, as much as Frank's personality and growing curatorial experience, also brought in new procedures of registration for ethnographic accessions to the *BM*. Early acquisitions were generally poorly documented: yet, from 1868 onwards the incorporation of new collections tended to be better recorded (King 1997: 151-152). Yet only very rarely did the registries record the original contexts and forms of collecting. However, these modifications in museum management did increase Frank's responsibilities, a situation that might have led him to hire, presumably out of his own pocket, a custodian: C. Read (1857-1929), who later became curator of ethnography (Chapman 1981: 145-146).

Third, changes on collecting activities under Frank's curatorship were related to the acquisition of Christy's collection. For along with the rich and substantial collection of *HCE*, this donation brought a £5000 endowment to the *BM*. This bequest –generally known as the 'Christy's Fund'– allowed the development of an active policy of purchase of ethnographic articles from museums, international exhibitions, dealers, and private collectors. Thus, Franks travelled extensively in Europe to visit museums and private collections. Apart from selecting specimens, he produced records of them, including a series of sketches, which may have served both for documentation purposes and to persuade the *BM* Trustees of the worth of the articles. Prime examples of these efforts were the drawings of the Mexican *Atlatl* obtained during 1870 from the Kleen Collection of Dresden, Germany (Figure 15) (BMCD 1870: 5226).

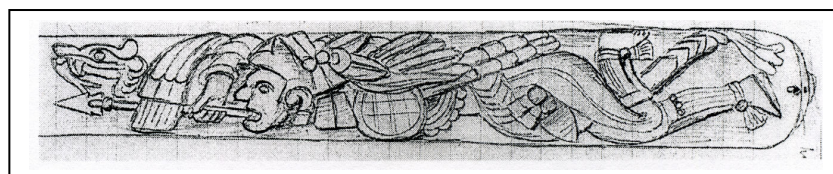


Figure 15. Detail of Drawing of a Mexican *Atlatl* by A.W. Franks  
(From BM Franks Notebooks)

To summarise, from the 1820s to the 1870s, the collecting of Mesoamerican objects at the *BM* had undergone significant transformations both in qualitative and quantitative terms. Moreover, it was under Franks' curatorship that this collection not only grew as never before, but also

consolidated in its practice. The same applies in relation to issues of its representation, as the following section will show.

#### 4.5.2. Representation

According to the printed guides, the *BM* exhibited Mexican antiquities for the first time in 1828 (BMSC 1828: 13). Although the description of these objects is not available, it is worth noting that they were located in the Egyptian Room (BMSC 1828: 13). Following Moser's study (2006: 76, 110), this space would have corresponded to the gallery number 8 of the Townley Gallery, which looked rather overcrowded and dark in comparison to those devoted to Classical sculpture.

The location of the Mexican antiquities should not surprise us for many reasons. As the time there was already a long standing tradition that connected Mesoamerica with Egyptian antiquity, which was expressed in textual, visual and material-based representations (Medina González 2003). In section 4.1.2, we have already examined the manner in which Bullock's exhibition sought to prove a connection between Egyptian and Mexican Antiquities. However, none has hitherto noted the impact that this association had on the representation of nineteenth-century institutional collections.

Archival information at the *BM* also records that Sloane's Mexican collection included an object mistakenly described as 'an Egyptian head of the Sun' (BMRC 518; King 1994: 234-236). It seems that the association between Mexican and Egyptian antiquities had a quite lasting effect in the representational framework of the *BM*. Still in 1832, when the renamed gallery of 'Artificial Curiosities' presented a large group of Mexican antiquities –including Bullock's–: the official *Synopsis* drew attention to 'a sitting figure similar to an Egyptian Sphinx' (BM 1832: 7-8). It is possible to argue that pointing to similarities between Mexican and Egyptian sculptures was supported by the fact that many scholars at the time were not aware of the temporal distance between Egyptian and Mesoamerican cultures, since chronologies had not been properly established (Medina González 2003).

The spatial and rhetorical relationship that the *BM* established between Egyptian and Mexican antiquities during the first third of the nineteenth century is thus informative of the academic knowledge available at the time. Furthermore, it also serves to approximate the issue of value. According to Moser (2006: 101-114), the *BM* 1820's display of Egyptian artefacts not only 'appeared a little strange and out of context', but this and further evidence seems indicative of the Trustees' and Keepers' indifference, and even hostility, to them. Due to the above associations, we could thus infer that similar attitudes prevailed over Mesoamerican antiquities. However, it is noteworthy that by the 1830s, some Pre-Columbian artefacts were also shown in the anteroom along with the 'Portland vase, Roman mural paintings and antiquities of Athens

and the Near East', objects of considerable appreciation at the time. Therefore, it can be suggested that Mesoamerican artefacts were subjected to rather ambiguous value-judgements during this period of time. Such an ambiguity can be also detected by taking into consideration another representational issue: temporal framing. For at the same time that Pre-Columbian artefacts were exposed alongside ethnographic materials, others were displayed in conjunction with productions of well-known *ancient* cultures, a physical proximity that appears to suggest an implicit recognition of the antiquity of Mesoamerica.

This latter posture seems further substantiated by taking into consideration the notions of those in charge of the Department of Antiquities of the *BM*, who –according to Jenkins (1992:221)– up to the 1840s still followed the Hellenocentric model developed by J. Winckelmann (1717-1768). Apart from being considered the 'founder of modern scientific archaeology' (Haskell & Penny 1981: 101), Winckelmann was the first art historian who developed the concept of 'historical style'. On the basis of this conceptualisation, his *magnus opus* –the *Geschichte der Kunst des Altertums* (1794)– stated that the history of art was determined less by the story of a particular artist than by the historical, geographical, and religious forces that surrounded its production (British 1968: 3). Following this approach, he asserted the superiority of Greek art over others –including the Egyptian and the Etruscan (Bernal 1987: 212-215)– and developed a lucid chronology of ancient art inspired on the 'Chain of Being' (Chapter 2).

An eloquent image of the above theoretical propositions is J. Stephanoff's watercolour *An Assemblage of Works of Art, from the Earliest Period to the Times of Phydias* (1854), which shows the progression from simple beginnings –represented by stone-relieves from ancient India, Mexico (Palenque) and Honduras (Copan)—to the refinement of the Parthenon marbles (Figure 16).

Figure. 16 *An Assemblage of Works of Art in Sculpture and Painting* by J. Stephanoff (From Jenkins 1992)

Aguirre (2005: 93) has recently interpreted this painting as both a demonstration of the above-mentioned *BM*'s 1840s plan for obtaining a sample of Mayan sculpture and an invocation of 'the cultural values and thus the logics of cultural difference that underwrote the imperial project'. However, this reading, however, simplifies the complexity of the painting's significance for the

history of Mesoamerican archaeology, for four reasons:

First, its composition clearly expressed that some mid nineteenth-century Britons recognised that Pre-Columbian artefacts could be qualified as art, which actually contradicts the classic normative axis of difference between art/artefact, degenerative-, savage- and decorative- art that was articulated by colonial/imperial ideology (Coombes 1994 43-57, 129-160).

Second, the painting did not assert cultural difference, but rather cultural inclusion by the enchainment of historical styles. Not surprisingly, Jenkins (1992: 221) has rightly interpreted the image as a depiction of the 'Chain of Art'.

Third, the *Assemblage* not only showed that the producers of the depicted Pre-Columbian sculptures belonged to the world of ancient cultures, but it actually proposed that Palenque and Copan sculpture were of deeper antiquity than even Egyptian and Near-East productions, an additional piece of evidence regarding the limitations and the deficiencies of the archaeological chronologies of the times.

Fourth, Stephanoff's work not only established a connection between the Pre-Columbian world and ancient India, but it actually placed them as the origin of the 'History of Art'. This location means that although the image entails a scale of aesthetic valuation, Mesoamerican productions were not considered to lack aesthetic value or 'primitive' (*contra* Aguirre 2005: 91). Perhaps, they could be better conceived of as 'archaic', a term that Winckelmann's followers employed to describe the primeval artistic period of the cycle of development postulated by his Theory of Historical Styles (British 1969: 3). Additional evidence supporting this view comes from the exhibition of Stephanoff's painting at the Old Watercolour society in 1845. Its gloss clearly described 'the *colossal* figures and bas-reliefs from Copan and Palenque' (British 1969: 3, *my italics*), a term that not only refers to their gigantic size, but also relates to 'the *origins* of public history' (Stewart 1993: 91, *my italics*). Moreover, it is worth mentioning that etymologically speaking, the word 'colossal' has been historically associated with the notions of the extraordinary, the powerful, the glorious, and a generalised sense of 'anything *awesomely* vast' (Weekley 1912; OED 1934).

In fifth place, rather than directly assuming there was an imperialist agenda behind Stephanoff's image, we must look at it in relation to the history of archaeological thought and representation, particularly to its links with *Orientalism*.

Stephanoff's representation of Copan's and Palenque's sculpture did echo Catherwood's engravings published in Stephens' *Incidents* (1841) (Aguirre 2005: 93). However, Stephens (1969 [1841]: II: 438-443) opposed any analogy and relationship between the Pre-Columbian cultures and their productions and those from India and other ancient cultures of the Old World. Therefore, in order to understand the content of Stephanoff's image, we must examine the work of J. F. Waldeck (1766?-1875), an archaeologist and artist, who had a long-standing career in the

representation of Mexican antiquities during the 1800s (Baudez 1993: 145). The reason for this is that Waldeck's *Voyage pittoresque et archéologique*, published in London in 1838, was the first that systematically proposed the existence of the cultural contacts between Mesoamerica and India, an idea that visibly influenced the pictorial results of his fieldwork (Waldeck [1838] 1996: 169, 235). As such, his textual and visual works have been interpreted as paradigmatic examples and powerful promoters of nineteenth-century cultural diffusionist theory (Baudez 1993: 147-149).

Paradoxically, it seems that Waldeck ([1838] 1996: 240) was the first to associate Palenque, Uxmal and the rest of Yucatan's archaeological sites with the term 'Maya', a word that distinguished the builders of those ruins from Aztecs and Toltecs. However, this categorisation enjoyed little acceptance amongst contemporary scholars, since Waldeck ([1838] 1996: 240) proposed that this term belonged to the Hindu language. Furthermore, he employed the terms 'Maya Art' and 'Maya Nation', which was described not only as a 'an eclipsed civilisation', but considered as extremely old, perhaps even older than some Western ancient civilisations (Waldeck [1838] 1996: 250-251). This dating opposed Stephens (1969 [1841]: I: 442) who was 'inclined to think that there [were] not sufficient grounds for the belief in the great antiquity of the ruins' of Palenque.

Edison (1999: 103-110) has convincingly proved the intellectual relationships between Waldeck and nineteenth-century *Orientalism*. Such a link is of significant importance to understand why Stephanoff depicted India (and therefore Copan and Palenque) as the origin of Western Art. To begin with, it is important to consider that the eighteenth-century French and British penetration of the Indian Subcontinent was accompanied by a growing interest in ancient Indian cultures and languages, which eventually gave birth to Indian archaeology and the modern science of philology (Singh 1996: 52-72; Schawb 1984: 51-80, 195-197). Although it is still in dispute whether or not *Orientalism* surpassed NeoClassicism during the first half of the 1800s (Bernal 1987: 228 *contra* Schawb 1984: 11, Rashed 1980: 10), there is plenty of evidence indicating that from the late eighteenth century onwards, some renowned European scholars had expressed the idea that India was more ancient and important than other European ancestral cultures for the development of Western culture. W. Hastings (1732-1818), founder of the Asiatic Society, not only reanimated a resplendent Hindu past, but he also identified it as the source of Western civilisation (in Singh 1996: 566). More passionately, by 1803, F. Schlegel (1772- 1829) stated that 'Everything, absolutely everything, is of Indian origin' (Bernal 1987: 230).

Hence, Stephanoff's watercolour truly represented an assemblage of various trends of thought that in one way or another influenced the interpretation of ancient civilisations, including Mesoamerica, during the first half of the nineteenth century: Hellenomania, Diffusionism and *Orientalism*. Moreover, it is noteworthy that *Orientalism* appears to have played a powerful influence on the *BM* interpretation of Pre-Columbian Cultures. According to King (1997: 137),



‘in the middle of the nineteenth century ethnography, including oriental material, was displayed in a small room to the west. Later on, from 1861 to 1866, the Ethnographic section, with its Mesoamerican collection, actually belonged to the Department of Oriental Antiquities (Medina-González 1999: 55).

Nevertheless, the association between the Mesoamerican and Oriental collections did not always mean that the *BM* authorities agreed on their value. Furthermore, it seems that aesthetic evaluation was the main factor in decision-making regarding their exhibition. According to the 1858 Officer’s Reports:

The Oriental, Mexican and Peruvian sculptures [were] put away in the same basement with the Persian. Their extent [could not] be precisely estimated for their almost *inaccessible* position (BMOR 1858, *my italics*)

The Standing Committee and the Trustees then wondered whether it was worth exhibiting Mexican antiquities at all. Enquiries to the *BM* staff clearly demonstrated two opposite opinions. On one hand, in the face of the suggestion that the entire Ethnographic collection should be moved to a less useful space for exhibition, E. Hawkins (1780-1867) –Keeper of the Department of Antiquities– reported that:

There is not any [area], which could be less appropriate to that purpose but in the basement store [for] they could not be exhibited there without great danger of being destroyed by damp. The collection is an exceedingly valuable one and is well worthy of being properly exhibited (BMOR 1859)

On other hand, A Panizzi (1797-1879) –Principal Director and Librarian– considered that the Byzantine, Oriental, Mexican and, Peruvian collections stored away in the basement ‘*were not a great loss*’ (in Miller 1973: 22, *my italics*). Furthermore, for him it did not seem ‘right that valuable space should be taken by Esquimaux dresses and *hideous feather idols*’, the last one probably being a crude reference to Aztec sculpture (in Caygill 1996: 39, *my italics*).

This debate can be related to a broader historical development of the general rationale of the *BM*, which has been described as ‘the imposition of an archaeological principle over an aesthetical approach’ both in the museum’s collections and displays (Jenkins 1992: 63). Indeed, the conflict between Panizzi and Hawkins seems a good example of the battles between the ‘new archaeologists and the old aesthetes’, which ended up with the withdrawal of the ‘Chain of Art’ and the adoption of G. Hegel’s (1770-1831) theory of limited artistic progress among the civilisations from the mid-1900s onwards (Jenkins 1992: 63). Moreover, Hegel’s views appear to have been key for the articulation of negative evaluations of the Mexican antiquities among the new generation of archaeologists of the *BM*. For in his *Lectures on the Philosophy of History* (1822-1831), Hegel (1890:85, in Keen 1984: 471) clearly showed a total disregard, if not contempt, for ancient America, by arguing that this was not only ‘a

natural culture that had to perish as long as the [Western] spirit approached it', but that the New World 'had always revealed itself as impotent both on physical and spiritual terms'.

No records have been found regarding the decision of the *BM* Trustees on the exhibition of Mexican antiquities after the debate between Hawkins and Panizzi. However, it is telling that by the second half of the nineteenth century, the *British Museum, Historical and Descriptive Guide* described the ethnographic section as an assemblage of objects that 'illustrate the manners and customs of nations lying at a distance from our own, as well as of *rude ancient races*' (in Miller 1974: 222, *my italics*). Such a description is revealing two important issues:

First, it suggests the manner by which some ancient productions were finally integrated into the ethnographic department, for it clearly establishes a (interchangeable) connection between geographical and temporal distance, which, as explained before, corresponds to the rationale of what Fabian (1983: 38) calls the *allochronism* of anthropological discourse.

Second, the statement shows that this politics of time not only allowed the equalisation of the 'Other' with the notion of the 'Primitive', but also the incorporation of some ancient races, by the negative value-judgement, expressed by the adjective 'rude'.

Fabian (1983: 26) has shown that evolutionary sequences and their concomitant political practice of imperialism were founded on distancing and separation. Indeed, evolutionist thought made anthropological *allocronism* a relevant scientific, ideological and, political discourse. Such a view is of significant importance if it is considered that the ethnographic section of the BM experienced significant changes from 1865 to 1893, a period that coincides with the expansion and consolidation of both cultural evolutionism and imperialism in Britain.

To begin with, it is worthy of notice that during the period, the ethnography exhibition area was magnified from one gallery to a complex of suites (Miller 1973: 252). Furthermore, for more than 20 years, ethnographic material was actually exhibited at two premises: due to lack of space at Bloomsbury, after the accession of Christy's collection, the Trustees agreed to maintain the exhibit at 103 Victoria Street. Such a development has been interpreted as resulting from Franks' efforts to make ethnography relevant for the *BM*. However, it can also be argued that ethnography grew because it began to fulfil a useful educational role. According to Franks, instead of showing 'the custom and manners of all countries', ethnography 'should illustrate the manners and customs of such races as have not been subjected directly to European civilisation, as to furnish the student with the means of examining the affinities and differences between such races and also to reconstruct some of the last pages of the history of the world' (in King 1993: 140). This aim was initially substantiated by following a geographical approach in the ordering of the ethnographic collection in the *BM* galleries, and later, by the incorporation of evolutionary schemes as the

basis of museum development (King 1993: 143). However, both schemes had different scales of impact. Indeed, as much as the *BM* greatly contributed to give coherence and legitimacy to the geographical system (King 1993: 140), their exhibit's rationale never progressed to the complexity of truly evolutionary displays, such as Pitt Rivers's at Oxford (Chapman 1985).

By 1868, the Victoria Street display initiated the transformation of the *BM* ethnographic displays, a process that implicated a series of changes. To begin with, the exhibition area was extended from one to four rooms in order to incorporate new acquisitions (BM 1868: 1). However, the display rationale was considerably simplified: case arrangements no longer articulated thematic internal categories, but strictly followed a general geographical outline (BM 1868: 12-20). The guidebook –written by Franks– also reduced the descriptions of the ethnographic objects to basics, thus presenting short formal accounts that lacked of interpretative elaborations (BM 1868: 12-20).

Interestingly enough, the Mexican collection maintained a special place in this new scheme of things. It not only occupied the largest number of cases (19 in total), but an independent table was assigned exclusively for displaying the collection of turquoise mosaics. The introductory essay of the guidebook mentioned that some pieces of the exhibition were 'of great rarity and value' and showed 'distinct styles of art' (BM 1868: 3). It is likely both categorisations refer to the Mexican Turquoise collection, which was described 'as the most remarkable specimens' of the ethnographic collection (BM 1868: 19).

The 1868 ethnographic display at Victoria Street suggests that by this time the integration of Mesoamerican antiquities into the realm of ethnography was indeed entering a critical stage, for three reasons.

Firstly, Mesoamerica did not fit into the general scheme that linked ethnography with colonial imperialist ideology that began to be articulated on the second half of the nineteenth century (Braunholtz 1953: 90; Coombes 1994).

Secondly, as a consequence of the development of evolutionist thought, it seems that the *BM* curators were facing problems trying to integrate Mesoamerica into the idea of the 'Primitive', a notion that crystallized –with anthropology itself– in the 1860s (Kupper 1988: 1) and became the defining cultural and aesthetical categorisation of ethnography during the nineteenth century (Shelton 2007). Furthermore, evidence indicates that influential anthropological figures of the nineteenth-century evolutionist movement never considered Ancient Mexico as 'Primitive'. For instance, in Morgan's tripartite model, the Aztecs are assigned to 'Middle Barbarism', the evolutionary stage that stood exactly halfway between Primitivism and Civilisation. Although not always explicitly, Tylor (2005 [1865]: 92) accepted that the Aztecs had achieved a greater stage of progress than the rest of North American peoples. Furthermore, he described some of the cultural achievements of the '*civilised* nations

of Central America' (Tylor 2005 [1865]: 92-100). The fact that Tylor (1958 [1883]: 1: 27), considered that ancient Mexicans were at least half-way stage along the path of civilisation is clearer in what is one of the most famous declarations of *Primitive Culture*, which states that 'few would dispute that the following races are arranged rightly in order of culture: Australian, Tahitian, Aztec, Chinese, Italian'. It is worth mentioning that in spite of the fact that Tylor's evolutionary categorization mainly reflected his interest in religious issues, he (1958 [1883]: I: 83) did consider that 'to trace the development of civilisation and the laws by which it is governed, nothing [was] so valuable as the presence of material objects'.

Thirdly, it was due to these categorisations that Pre-Columbian objects were never considered fully primitive, tribal or savage (Williams 1993: 330). Indeed, by the late nineteenth century, it seems that British scholars were even willing to recognise the artistic quality of Mesoamerican artefacts. This

Figure 17. Two-headed serpent with mosaic work acquired by the BM thanks to Christy Fund  
(From McEwan 1994: 80)

was particularly evident in the case of objects with mosaics inlaid with turquoise. Effectively, when Franks presented the double-headed serpent (Figure 17) recently acquired by the *BM* to the Society of Antiquaries of London in 1894, a paper given by Read (1894: 387, *my italics*) described it as an example of 'Mexican *art*'.

#### 4.5.2. Interpretation

Few records have been found regarding the public reception of the *BM* Mesoamerican displays. Notably, most of them derive from the first half of the nineteenth century and showed sympathetic attitudes regarding the Pre-Columbian collections. According to Caygill (1996: 25-26), the Mexican series were the most popular objects of attraction when the museum opened for the first public holiday in 1837. This popularity was perhaps fuelled due to the parallel opening of the new Egyptian galleries (Moser 2006: 158), where part of the Mexican collection was on display.

Moser (2006: 158) has linked the popular esteem of the Egyptian antiquities to two historical events: the proliferation of periodicals and educational literature at the time and the widening of access to the museum from the 1830s onwards. Moreover, she has suggested that the two processes were interlinked to generate appropriate modes of conduct for the *BM* visitors. It is worthy of attention that one of the key contributors to this –*The Penny Magazine*– informed the

visitor that under the rule of not being obtrusive, ‘You will see many things in the Museum that you do not understand’ (in Moser 2006: 158). This would suggest that visitors might have found difficulties to grasping the link between Mesoamerica and Ancient Egypt that the display suggested by the proximity of the collections. However, an article from 1855 declared that some Mexican figures were arranged along the walls in the Egyptian Room, where the student of ethnology could find ‘the resemblance of some [Egyptian figures] in posture, and decoration of the head, to some Mexican’ (Connolly 1855: 42).

A series of accounts confirmed that by the 1840s the Mexican Antiquities of the *BM* had also gained a place in the popular imagination. Commercial guides included descriptions of them (e.g. Masson 1844). In 1847, the *Illustrated London News* announced that the *BM* acquired a new set of Mexican antiquities (ILN 1847: 220) and compared them with Greek antiques (Figure 18). This supports the idea that during the first half of the nineteenth century, Mesoamerica and its productions were perceived both by scholars and members of the public as part of the Ancient World, rather than as ethnographic ‘curiosity’.



Figure 18. New Mexican Antiquities in the British Museum (ILN 1847: 22)

Paradoxically, we can also draw information from the absence of data regarding the reception of the *BM* Mexican collection from the 1850s onwards. For such data suggests that public access to its display became more limited at this time. The reasons for this are basically two-fold. On the one hand, we know that for a certain period of time the collection was stored away in the basement. On the other, from 1865 to 1886, the largest, richest and most complex *BM* exhibit on ancient Mexico was located at 103 Victoria Street, where public access is likely to have been a lot more restricted due to the lack of staff ascribed in the Ethnographic section.

During the nineteenth century, the *BM* was not the only institutional museum where Pre-Columbian artefacts were displayed for English-speaking people. Indeed, evidence indicates that also some American organisations participated in this tradition. Although, the information about this topic is scarce, and thus limits our analysis, the following section presents a brief review of the ways in which Mesoamerica objects were collected and display in the United States from 1830 to 1870.

#### 4.6. MESOAMERICAN ANTIQUITIES IN THE US 1830-1870: A REVIEW

It appears that early and middle nineteenth-century America never saw a systematic exhibition

on Mesoamerica that was comparable to the British counterparts. However, some, though scarce, data indicates that during this period, United States' citizens did collect Pre-Columbian antiquities, which might have been displayed in domestic or informal ways. There is also information about some initiatives for displaying Mesoamerican objects, which for diverse reasons did not bear fruit. A brief summary on this rather understudied subject is presented as follows, since it serves for comparative analysis between the British and the American experience of collecting and displaying Mesoamerica during the early and middle nineteenth century.

As stated in Section 4.3.1, during the 1830s, US soldiers collected Mesoamerican antiquities within the context of the American invasion of Mexico. The most famous of these was C. Cushing's collection that consisted of stone idols, pitchers, vases, musical instruments and numerous objects in terracotta, all which were acquired in similar circumstances to those described in Young's 1855 catalogue: when the US divisions held a position near to Mexico City (SDH 1878).

From the times of the American-Mexican War, it dates the earliest register of the presence of a Mesoamerican collection in the United States: amongst a series of documents unpublished until now, the *British Museum Records* holds a drawing of a series of Pre-Columbian sculptures and figures that, according to a marginal caption, were located at the American Philosophical Society (hereafter *APS*), a scholarly organisation founded by B. Franklin in 1745 in Philadelphia (BMR: Franks drawing: 18). The detailed drawing allows the identification of an Aztec stone mask as well as a couple of Olmec stone-figurines among the Society's holdings. No information has been found yet regarding the origin of this collection. Neither is it known whether it was ever exhibited by the *APS* during nineteenth century. However, it can be hardly a coincidence that during 1832 Philadelphia saw the publication of *The History of Ancient Mexico* by the prolific historian Thomas Gordon (1787-1860).

Gordon's work on ancient Mexico has often been overlooked by general histories of American and Mexican archaeology (Bernal 1980; Willey & Sabloff 1993). Yet, it can be considered the first American scholarly study entirely devoted to the study of Mexican antiquity (Keen 1984: 361). Moreover, by taking into account the works of Clavijero and Humboldt, this work clearly departed from the writings of Du Pauw and Robertson, attributing a degree of civilisation to Aztec intellectual and artistic achievements (Gordon 1832: I; 70-81, 176).

Sharing some of Gordon's views and inaugurating the ambassador/consular tradition that characterised much nineteenth-century American collecting of Mesoamerican artefacts (Hinsley 1993: 109), during the 1830s and 1840s Brantz Mayer –the Secretary of the US legation in Mexico— amassed a large number of Pre-Columbian antiquities, some of which were acquired from Jose Mariano Sánchez Mora, 3rd Count of Peñasco, a prominent landowner, politician and

collector from the Mexican elite, who was also a member of Mexico's earliest cultural and artistic societies, including the National Museum (Mayer 1844: 100). Therefore, the association between Mayer and Peñasco bears proof that American collecting of Pre-Columbian artefacts also benefited from the dynamics of 'symbiotic transculturation'.

Mayer's written account *Mexico as it was and it is* (Mayer 1844: 102, 104) actually illustrated part of his holdings, along with illustrations of private and public Pre-Columbian collections in Mexico, all of which included fraudulent pieces (Walsh 2006: 3). Interestingly enough, one of the ceramic vessels depicted by Mayer's work (1844: 93), 'which Tylor (1862: 229) later declared to be a fake, in fact appears to be authentic' (Walsh 2006: 3). This shows that by the mid-nineteenth century, American collectors of Pre-Columbian artefacts were exposed to the same market dynamics that affected their British contemporaries (Section 4.3.1). Unfortunately, we do not know whether Mayer ever employed his collection to produce a similar display to those presented in England.

Yet, Mayer did attempt to stimulate the collecting and display of Mexican antiques in the US, since he constantly urged the Smithsonian Institution to gather artefacts from that country (Hinsley 1993: 109). It appears that such demands went unheard during the 1840s and 1850s. No documents have been found explaining such a response. However, it is noteworthy that during those decades some influential American scholars –namely L. Cass (1840) and A. Gallatin (1845)– found it hard to believe in the magnificent achievements attributed to ancient Mexicans by Clavijero, Humboldt and Gordon (in Keen 1984: 361). Furthermore, there is plenty of evidence indicating that the transport of goods from Mexico to the US was extremely problematic at the time (Soberon 2001: 24-25).

By the mid-1840s, American audiences saw the publication of two interrelated works that have been long considered crucial for the development of public interest in Mesoamerican topics in the US: W. Prescott's *History of Mexico* (1843) and J. Stephens and C. Catherwood's *Incidents of Travel* (1841, 1843), whose relevance for the history of American archaeology has been pointed out elsewhere (Wauchope 1965; Keen 1984: 366-374, Willey & Sabloff 1993: 50; Evans 2004: 146-87; Aguirre 2005: 61-134). Nevertheless, hitherto scholarly literature has generally overlooked the relationship of these works to the history of American collecting of Pre-Columbian artefacts.

As Soberon (2001: 25) has recently pointed out, Prescott was appointed as a member of the APS in 1839. Therefore, it is likely that he was acquainted with this Society's collection of Mesoamerican artefacts even before he initiated documentary research for the writing of his *History*. Furthermore, personal correspondence with F. Calderon de la Barca –author of *Life in Mexico* (1843) and spouse of the 1839-1841 Spanish Ambassador to Mexico– has revealed that in 1840 Prescott sought to acquire an Aztec skull (Soberón 2001: 69). The aim was to complete an 'anatomic collection located in Boston, which lacked [such a] link' (Soberón 2001: 69), a clear

manifestation of the rise of phrenology in American early anthropology, mainly thanks to the publication of *Crania Americana* (1839) by S. Morton (1799-1851).

Both the APS's and Mayer's collection of Pre-Columbian materials mainly consisted of stone sculpture and ceramic figurines from Central Mexico that had been previously owned by other collectors. In comparison, Stephens and Catherwood amassed a varied collection of antiquities – carved wood lintels, architectural fragments, ceramic vessels and sculptured decorations–, some of which were gathered *in situ* during their survey of archaeological sites in the southeast of Mexico and Central America (Evans 2004: 73). The *Incidents of Travel* also provided details of the collecting process. For example, Stephens (1969 [1841]: II: 230-231) described his excavations at a mound in Quetzaltenango, which resulted in the extraction of a series of vessels, which were reproduced by Catherwood for the travelogue. This also explained that the American explorer secured the items by promising the landowner of the mound to 'give him all the treasure, and take for [his] share only the skulls, vases and other curiosities' (Stephens 1969 [1841]: II: 230). Being a liberal man, Stephens also purchased two tablets with inscriptions located at the town of Palenque, a business deal that required the assistance of the American consul at Laguna (Stephens 1969 [1841]: II: 364). The way in which these negotiations took place Stephens' attempt at purchasing Palenque and his acquisition of Copan for 50\$ dollars for the purpose of creating a National Museum in the US (Stephens 1969 [1841]: II: 364, I: 126-128) were widely disseminated during the 1840s and 1850s through the *Incidents* to large numbers of Americas readers, particularly in New York (Ortega y Medina 1962a: 172).

It was precisely in this city where from 1841 to 1842 Americans might have had the opportunity to see Stephens' and Catherwood's collection at a venue called *The Rotunda*, an establishment owned by Catherwood himself and George Jackson (to Von Hagen (1950: 82-84); Otterman 1997: 318; Bourbon (1999: 194).

Situated near Broadway attractions, *The Rotunda* enjoyed a location that ensured its huge popularity in New York (Otterman 1997: 318). It is perhaps due to the Rotunda's reputation that some researchers have argued that queues of New Yorkers attended Stephens' and Catherwood's display of Mesoamerican antiquities (Von Hagen 1950: 83; Bourbon 1999: 194). However, none of the press articles or independent narratives of the epoch indicate that the exhibition was such a success, or even that it was ever opened for public inspection (NYE 1842; NYH 1842a, 1842b, Horne in Von Hagen 1950: 82). In fact, the *New York Herald* (NYH 1842b) clearly reported that the collection was merely on deposit at the building.

Whether or not Stephens' and Catherwood's collection was ever on public display, it seems that this situation did not last for long. During the night of the 31<sup>st</sup> of July of 1842, a fire struck in *The Rotunda* having disastrous consequences: as Horne's diary explained, 'the valuable collection of curiosities and relics, and other precious things [...] collected in Central America' perished in



the flames (in Von Hagen 1950: 83). The same happened, according to the local press, to Catherwood's drawings, original paintings, and plans of the Pre-Columbian monuments (NYH 1842a, 1842b). There is no solid evidence of whether Catherwood had already finished the panorama depicting Central American ruins that he planned to exhibit at *The Rotunda*. However, if that was the case, it was also reduced to ashes.

Contemporary accounts conveyed great sorrow over the disaster (NYH 1842a, 1842b, NYP 1842). The most unequivocal manifestation was that of Horne (in Von Hagen 1950: 83) who stated that the catastrophe 'constituted a severe loss [...] to science and arts in general', an indirect statement of the research potential and aesthetic value ascribed to the Pre-Columbian collection at the time. Yet, part of Stephens' and Catherwood's Mesoamerican collection survived since almost immediately after his return to the US, Stephens had given a series of sculptures and bas-reliefs to his friend John Cruger (1807-1879). The manner through which this attorney, soldier and heir of a powerful American family integrated these artefacts into an architectural feature for their display from the 1840s onwards will be subject to further analysis in Chapter 5.

It seems that from the 1850s to the 1860s, there was a considerable decrease in the American collecting of Mesoamerican artefacts. The reasons for this are not entirely clear yet. However, until the 1880s transport of goods between Mexico and the US was rather problematic (Soberon 2001: 46-68). Moreover, the fact that the US was immersed in domestic affairs, most predominantly the American Civil War (1861-1865), might have contributed to the lack of interest in Pre-Columbian archaeology. Furthermore, there was almost no institutional demand for the collecting of Mesoamerican antiquities during these times, since with the exception of the Smithsonian Institution of Washington D.C. –founded in 1846–, most nineteenth-century American Museums were not established until after the mid-1860s (Alexander 2007). Thus, it comes as no surprise that Mayer selected the Smithsonian Institution for the donation of part of his collection at the beginning of the 1860s, an event that marked the incorporation of Mesoamerican collections into American public organisations. Unfortunately, no data has been found on the display of this collection at this early time. A similar situation prevails regarding a series of private Mesoamerican collections that were incorporated during the late 1860s and early 1870s into the Peabody Museum, the first museum in America exclusively devoted to anthropology, which was founded in 1866 within the administrative structure of Harvard University, Boston (SDH 1878 in PMC 1878; PMR 1860-1870: ACV 1,2,4). However, archival documentation states that acquisitions, which consisted basically of terracotta figures, idols, casts of Aztec monumental sculpture and sculptures were donated by private collectors, including army officials (e.g. Captain Cushings), diplomats (e.g. Mayer), and traveller scientists (e.g. Profr. Luis Agassiz (SDH 1878 in PMC 1878; PMR 1860-1870: ACV 1,2,4).

By the late 1870s, having sloughed off the effects of the Civil War, Americans started to flock to

Mexico. The juncture could not be more appropriate, since the two nations were forging trade arrangements, while the Mexican railway network, much of it financed by United States capital, was rapidly expanding (Carr 1994: 254). At the beginning of an era of American hemispheric expansion (Hinsley 1993: 113), Americans thus found themselves seeking in Mexico, among other things, economic prospects of various kinds, retreat from northern winters, reinvigorated health, and social contact ranging from sightseeing and leisure lifestyles to serious anthropology, including archaeological pursuits (Carr 1994: 254). Mexico offered plenty of opportunities for satisfying such demands. After decades of internal political disputes and European colonialist attempts, this country was finally about to enter one of its most stable and developing periods: the Porfiriato, a term refers to the thirty-seven years (1874-1911) when General Porfirio Díaz (1830-1915) ruled Mexico. During the Porfiriato, Mexican archaeology and its institutional homeland –The National Mexican Museum– consolidated both in the academic and political realms (Bernal 1980: 130-159; Morales-Moreno 1998: 38-45); however, the US history of collecting and displaying Pre-Columbiana at this period is out of the scope of this thesis.

## 4.7. CONCLUSIONS

This chapter and its respective appendixes constitute the first systematic study of the background and development of nineteenth century British and American displays on Mesoamerican material culture, a historical phenomenon that has been previously analysed only in a rather limited and superficial fashion in academic literature. It examined six case studies in depth, and a number of poorly documented examples more superficially, which serve to draw some initial conclusions that constitute the main contributions of this investigation up to this stage.

### 4.7.1. Production

Nineteenth-century American and British exhibitions of Mesoamerican material culture were vast and varied in their contents. However, these variables behaved differently throughout the years and according to national circumstances.

Perhaps due to the increasing interest in Mesoamerica archaeology during the nineteenth century (Diaz-Andreu 2007: 168), both in the United Kingdom and the United States the number of artefacts *per* exhibit increased from one display to the following. Nevertheless, this tendency differed considerably in both of the countries under examination. Britain saw a progressive enlargement in the number of Pre-Columbian items presented in exhibitions over time –whereas Bullock’s 1824 *Ancient Mexico* held more than 70 artefacts, Young’s presented more than 500, and Christy’s private exhibit displayed more than 600–. Although it never

exhibited all its Mesoamerican collection in its galleries, by the end of the 1800s the British Museum had gathered hundreds of antiquities from Mexico and Central America. In comparison, the growth of Mesoamerican collections was more erratic in the US: it is very likely that during the first half of the nineteenth century American collections did not surpass a couple of hundred Pre-Columbian items.

Nineteenth-century British and American exhibitions of Mesoamerica showed a great variability of objects, including authentic archaeological artefacts, fakes, and copies. However, it seems that through time exhibitions tended to present basically the same corpus of material culture: ceramics, terracotta figurines, sculpture, stone-tools and sometimes, Codices. It is likely that the homogeneity of the exhibits' contents through the 1800s was due not only to the abundance of these type of objects at their places of origin, but also to the preference of the collectors and the objects' resistance, size and weight, which made them feasible for long-distance transportation.

Collecting Mesoamerican antiquities during the nineteenth century was a sophisticated activity since it implied a high degree of complexity in terms of the procedures, the agents and the agencies involved. For analytical purposes, two major trends can be distinguished: secondary and primary collecting.

As in previous centuries, secondary collecting continued to be an important source of Mesoamerican antiquities for nineteenth-century British collectors. It comprehended various activities, including negotiations with dealers, acquisition at auctions, exchanges, donations and purchases from local and overseas agents. In fact, due to a policy of aggressive of secondary collecting, during the second half of the nineteenth century, Britain was able to obtain unique Mesoamerican artefacts, which had belonged to sixteenth, seventeenth and eighteenth centuries European private cabinets and scientific institutions. American collections also grew on the basis of secondary collecting, but they never achieved the scale and magnificence of acquisitions of its British counterpart.

Primary collecting was an innovation of the nineteenth-century British-American 'exhibitionary complex', since earlier exhibitions had rarely obtained their collections directly *in situ*. In fact, this activity flourished in the course of the 1800s, becoming more intense and developing a variety of procedures: surface-gathering at archaeological sites, excavation, changing of dominion of local collections, and purchasing items from local inhabitants. Digs were not always carried out for archaeological purposes, which meant that the discovery of the antiquities was merely a product of chance. Yet, since findings were salvaged and preserved, it appears that their founders ascribed a value to them. It is also worth of consideration that some nineteenth-century collectors gathered information about the archaeological context in which the artefacts had been found, which they later employed to articulate explanations on display. Purchasing was

conducted in large scale: furthermore, it seems that market demands contributed to the incorporation of fakes into British and American collections from dates as early as the 1850s.

Most of the items collected during the nineteenth century for Britons and Americans corresponded to cultures that had occupied Central Mexico during the Pre-Columbian times. In fact, a large majority of objects were identified as Aztec. By the 1850s, British exhibitions incorporated artefacts associated with the Toltec Culture. Although Catherwood's panorama planned to exhibit items from the Maya region, it was not until 1870s that American and British displays began to incorporate and, more importantly, to recognise the cultural ascription of Mayan antiquities. Both the Smithsonian and the British Museum were precursors in presenting both Aztec and Maya antiquities in the same setting.

British and American private collections of Mesoamerican artefacts were to a large extent the origin of the institutional collections of both these countries. This demonstrates that private collecting/displaying was essential for the development of the nineteenth-century 'exhibitionary complex', a phenomenon that has been obscured by the birth of institutional museums (Bennett 1998).

Collecting choices determined certain aspects of the displays' production. For instance, most of the exhibits involved the installation of pedestals, tables and/or cases to elevate small-size stone-sculptures in order to facilitate their examination. However, the major influence in the production of nineteenth-century British and American displays was the work of curators: their personal abilities and professionalism determined to a great degree the characteristics of each display. The planning of the displays was not an easy task: it involved the installation of collections at the galleries, the arrangement of the display-settings and the elaboration of supplementary material, such as advertising and written-guides.

Publicising and the publication of guidebooks were key components derived from the production of almost all private displays. Since these materials made explicit the rationale of the exhibits, or at least provided clues for their understanding, they are useful research tools to uncover the ideas that displays intended to convey to their viewers, issues that correspond to the realm of representation.

#### **4.7.2. Representation**

Nineteenth-century British and American exhibits on Mesoamerican artefacts were presented in several types of display-spaces, including show-galleries, panoramas, private premises, museums and scholarly institutions. Equally variable were the modes of display in which Pre-Columbian material was exhibited. These ranged from recreations, ornamental settings to rather conventional glass-case exhibits. The selection of the representational modes employed at one

given exhibit also depended on the very nature of the display setting, its rationale and the motives of their producers for its creation. Institutional displays maintained a more traditional approach to displaying, whereas private displays tended to be more innovative in their modes of representation.

British and American displays articulated archaeological knowledge through a series of representation strategies. These involved the formulation of narratives by the written-guides, the operation of technologies of display, such as the arrangement of collections, the categorisation of artefacts, their labelling and description, and the creation of specific display-settings, by means of ornamentation and the distribution of gallery-infrastructure, among others. Through these mechanisms, displays configured explanatory statements about the characteristics of Mesoamerican cultures. Both rhetoric and visual devices were employed to assert the display's authority to represent the Pre-Columbian past. Through the interplay of various representation strategies, displays developed a specific textual/visual/object language, in which every medium was employed to the best of its capabilities and in complementary fashion. It was through the articulation of this mixed language that exhibits became three-dimensional archaeological representations in their own right.

Exhibits approached Mesoamerica either through general or partial-comparative perspectives. This depended on whether Mesoamerican collections were put on display independently, or as part of larger ethnographic or anthropological displays. Depending on its coverage and the interests of its producers, each exhibit approached diverse topics regarding the Pre-Columbian world. These included key archaeological themes, including manner in which it was thought Mesoamerican people lived, some aspects regarding the characteristics of their societies, and certain elements of their belief-system.

Some themes became dominant for representation of Mesoamerica in displays through the period under examination. One of them was that of religion; however, early and middle nineteenth-century British and American exhibits on displays of Mesoamerica not *only* represented this topic to increase or complement knowledge about Biblical history (*contra* Diaz-Andreu 2007: 16, *my emphasis*). Rather, displays also formulated representations of Pre-Columbian religion to trace an axis of difference between the 'Self' –Western Christianity– and the 'Other' –non-Western paganism–. Such a relation of alterity between the present British and American world and the ancient Pre-Columbian past was not shaped within a political vacuum, since it implied a sense of hierarchy. Along the length of a positive-negative axis, displays denoted the superiority of European Christian modernity in relation to the inferiority of the Mesoamerican pagan past.

As part of this, Mesoamerican religious systems were commonly simplified to two interrelated themes: the appearance of the Pre-Columbian deities and the sacrificial practices performed for

devotional purposes. The emphasis on these topics was indeed related to the preferences of the collecting processes, since many stone-sculptures were gathered for display. However, curators almost invariably represented these items as 'idols'. Therefore, collecting traditions appears to have contributed to representational persistence. Furthermore, the exhibit's representation also showed a powerful attraction, if not obsession, with ritual sacrifice, a theme that –as much as cannibalism– has long exerted both fascination and revulsion in Western society. It is perhaps in the representation of Mesoamerican religious issues that we can detect more clearly the reproduction of a Eurocentric bias commonly employed by Western countries to justify the domination of 'Other' cultures, within an imperialistic rationale. In this sense, nineteenth-century exhibitions on Mesoamerica were highly political, since they equated relationships between power and cultural difference, extending such strategies of domination over a territory that was a non-colonised area at the time.

Another topic frequently approached by the exhibits was that of value, and particularly of the aesthetic valuation attributed to Pre-Columbian artefacts. Regarding this topic, early and middle nineteenth-century British and American displays were indeed far from recognising the aesthetic values of Mesoamerican productions on their own terms. Perhaps for these reasons, early exhibitions often described the appearance of Pre-Columbian objects in negative terms, an attitude that was similar to that expressed about much ethnographic material culture during the late 1800s (see Coombes 1994). However, these perceptions changed over time. From the 1840s onwards, British and American curators could not always resist fascination over some Mesoamerican articles, particularly those of the finest workmanship, which then came to be recognised as artistic productions. In fact, as time passed by, this recognition became a very problematic element for display-representation. Particularly, during the second half of the nineteenth century, it meant that Mesoamerica became an anomalous figure for categorisation within the conventional frameworks of alterity that did not accept that the normative 'Other' –a non-Western culture– could develop art. Furthermore, documentary evidence indicates that the recognition of artistic value was a factor that promoted the separation of Mesoamerica from the general universe of ethnography.

Nineteenth-century British and American displays both shaped and articulated archaeological knowledge about Mesoamerica throughout the interaction of theory, explanation and material evidence. For instance, Bullock's *Ancient Mexico* stressed the cultural links between Aztecs and Egyptians, by superposing the setting decoration, addressing analogies between the objects, and naming Pre-Columbian artefacts with Egyptian names. Such an operation aimed to address debates regarding the origins of humankind. Such a topic was also approached by Young's display. However, this took a quite different theoretical ground, since it extended the connections between Mesoamerica and other Old World ancient cultures in order to assume a position within the monogenist/polygenist debate of the mid-1800s. Almost at the same time,

the British Museum integrated Mesoamerican artefacts within the 'Chain of Art'. This framework was later abandoned for a more archaeological approach, which meant that Pre-Columbian cultures were fully incorporated within ethnography, and thus, inevitably within the tenets of evolutionary theory. In fact, the development of the Mesoamerican exhibits at the *BM* show the tension between competing models, as much as their weaknesses and strengths for the incorporation of Pre-Columbian cultures within them. Evolutionism also provided the conceptual foundations for the articulation of Christy's exhibit on ethnographic and prehistoric artefacts, categories whose very development at the time was intrinsically linked with evolutionary thinking. Nevertheless, its curator also articulated, and in the process of it also elaborated on, archaeological systems of dating. Unfortunately, not much information exists regarding the theoretical grounding of early object-based American displays on Mesoamerica.

Taking the above data into account, it is thus possible to conclude that exhibits were not passive media, which only echoed scholarly explanations. Rather, display representation was a dynamic mechanism for formulation and transmission of ideas that were not explicit elsewhere. Exhibitions also elaborated explanations on the basis of theoretical models, and responded to, even contested, interpretations presented by the academic literature. Such operations meant that exhibitions effectively played an active and distinctive role in the interpretative processes that were at the core of the development of Mesoamerican archaeology during the 1800s. By their very nature, exhibits participate in the transmission of knowledge to the general public, an issue that lead us to further examine the theme of display interpretation.

#### **4.7.3. Interpretation**

Press reviews were never fully comprehensive in their examination of exhibitions about Mesoamerican artefacts. Rather, they focused on certain elements of their representation, a selection that seems telling of the aspects that attracted more powerfully the attention of the audiences to the displays. Among these, it seems that the collections themselves, especially the appearance of certain items that did not conform to Western aesthetic standards, stimulated to a large degree the response of the visitors. However, they did not always express disregard, or repulsion for the Pre-Columbian objects. In fact, the press reviews often expressed amazement at the Mesoamerican antiquities and in more than one instance encouraged their collection on the basis of their scientific and educational value. Press reviews also devoted plenty of attention to Mesoamerican religion, which seems a logical consequence of the stress given to this topic by the displays. Moreover, it appears that the exhibits were pretty efficient in transmitting the idea that Mesoamerican peoples practised idolatry, since the reviews often referred to 'idols' shown at the exhibits.

In addition, there is plenty of evidence indicating that curators were able to convince some display's visitors that Mesoamerican cultures had been somehow linked to some ancient cultures of the Old World, including the Egyptian and the Indian. In this respect, press reviews not only supported diffusionist theories, but further elaborated on them, a proof that certain members of the audience were able to generate independent opinions regarding the exhibits.

In this sense, this chapter has shown that displays served not only to transmit knowledge, but also to stimulate its generation. Furthermore, it confirms the view that the representational system of an exhibition was intrinsically dependent on issues of production. Furthermore, studies of the interpretation of a given historical exhibit serve to examine, and to some extent to evaluate, whether or not display technologies managed to convince their audiences.

Furthermore, by taking into consideration the information presented in this chapter, it becomes clear that exhibits succeeded in transmitting, if not a complete, a partial idea of the messages that displays intended to convey. This included ideas that attempted to structure Mesoamerica as an ancient civilisation, as the following section will show.

#### **4.7.4. Structuration**

Early and middle nineteenth century British and American exhibitions contributed to the articulation of Mesoamerican cultures as an 'ancient civilisation', a process that involved the structuration and dissemination of two highly complex conceptualizations: 'ancientness' and 'cultural complexity'.

The concept of 'ancientness' was articulated first and foremost by formulation the idea of the 'past', which required the operation of a series of timing technologies at the displays.

- Labelling: using the familiar terms of 'ancient', 'antiquity, and 'antiquities' to name exhibit, describe its topic, and categorise objects.
- Formulating rupture, periodisation and qualification: this worked by creating a contraposition of the 'ancient' with the 'modern', creating an effect of time-rupture, which in turn, resulted in a process of periodisation. The sense of historical rupture was further reinforced by presenting a narrative about events of periods that separated modernity from its ancient past. Periodisation was articulated by formulating the metaphor of lightness-darkness-rebirth that since the fourteenth century characterised the normative chronological division between Antiquity, Middle Ages and Renaissance (see Chapter 2).
- Articulating time-depth: by proposing a chronology, exhibitions created a sense of time-depthness on the representation of the Pre-Columbian era.



- Creating associations: by associating Mesoamerica with other ancient cultures, namely the Egyptian and the Indian, that were already known by Western audiences, displays reinforced the concept of ancientness

It is noteworthy that the antiquity of Pre-Columbian artefacts were never completely erased from their representation in the British Museum, whose guides and physical arrangements appear to have associated them with other ancient cultures during the first half of the nineteenth century. Furthermore, it seems that during the 1850s due to the dominance of the artistic framework known as the 'Chain of Art' and the association of Mesoamerica with Indian culture, Pre-Columbian artefacts were considered of great antiquity, if not the very origin of the world's art. This state of affairs changed from the 1860s onwards, with the rise of evolutionary theory, which associated non-Western ethnographic cultures with the idea of the 'Primitive', a category that meant the collapse of historical time. However, it appears that Mesoamerican artefacts could not be fully integrated into the timeless framework of ethnography. This was more than obvious in Christy's display, where these objects were not only labelled as antiquities, but also grouped following the rupture categories: ancient and modern. The British Museum exhibits were perhaps less explicit in representing the antiquity of Pre-Columbian cultures; however, by the end of the century, the division between ethnography and Mesoamerican antiquities became more than evident by their location at the galleries and the guides' narratives. In addition, some Mesoamerican productions were introduced as subjects of inquiry of the discipline of archaeology, by means of their presentation and study at learned organizations, such as the Archaeological Society. Due to the scarcity of information, it is difficult to know whether American displays structured any notion of timing for the representation of Mesoamerican collections.

From a very early stage, nineteenth-century object-based British and American exhibits showed, in one way or another, that Mesoamerican cultures were advanced in cultural terms. Depending on the type of exhibition and its coverage, this operation entailed deploying different display strategies.

Holistic displays such as Bullock's showed the great achievements reached by the Aztecs, by showing that they had developed large, planned and well-organised cities, a complex religion, economic and political institutions (markets, royal courts, etc), and writing systems. Furthermore, Ancient Mexico offered tangible proof of the existence of these traits in the form of documentation, eyewitness accounts, and material evidence. Thanks to these and other claims, Bullock was able to contest late eighteenth-century scholarly statements, which based on climatic deterministic theories, had proposed the intrinsic inferiority of America and its native societies. In addition, by establishing some similarities between ancient Mexicans and Egyptians, this exhibit recognised that both of these cultures were comparable, which in a sense implied

that they were similar in their development. Yet, this display could not escape the Eurocentric bias of the era exhibition, for it still showed a resistance to accept that Egyptian civilisation and Ancient Mexico were of equal cultural complexity. In fact, its written guide stated that the last culture was inferior to the former due to the bloody nature of its religion, which, following Orientalism, was associated with India.

Bullock's exhibit managed to transmit the idea that Aztecs had achieved a sophisticated level of development, since most of the press reviews agreed on many of arguments articulated by the display representation. Moreover, it is worth pointing out that this exhibition managed to employ the largest number of representational strategies for articulating the cultural complexity of Mesoamerica of all object-based nineteenth-century British and American displays. In fact, one of the most significant contributions of this chapter has been to prove that Bullock developed a textual/visual/object grammar for the articulation of specific structural ideas of the notion of ancient civilisation, which would eventually be consolidated, by repetition, by latter exhibitions. For instance, Young's 1855 exhibit also represented the idea that the Aztecs had achieved a certain degree of cultural complexity, by showing material evidence of the development of writing and calendar systems. Furthermore, it stressed the relationship between Aztecs and Old World ancient civilisations, which by association created the effect of an analogy in terms of development. However, as much as in the case of Bullock's exhibit, this display also represented Aztec religion as essentially idolatrous, and thus a derivation of paganism, a category that implied a sense of inferiority, or at least opposition, regarding Christianity. Therefore, it appears that ancient Mexico was represented as civilised, but not to the extent of their European counterparts.

Early exhibits at the British Museum also stressed the connections between Aztec and Egyptian cultures, both by placing side by side sculpture samples from both cultures and mentioning their similarities in their written guides. The fact that Mesoamerica was considered an ancient civilisation within this institutional setting is suggested by the fact that by the 1840s, Pre-Columbian productions were exhibited and depicted along with those of Old World ancient cultures both at the galleries and as part of paintings representing the 'Chain of Art'. Furthermore, as explained before, there is evidence suggesting that at some point Mesoamerican material culture was considered part of the origins of the world's ancient art. This was of significant importance since, as explained in Chapter 3, the development of art has been long considered a defining trait of the notion of civilisation in Western thought.

It was precisely a process of aesthetic valuation that led to the discrimination and separation of Mesoamerican productions from the rest of the ethnographic collections both at Christy's and the British Museum's displays from the 1860's onwards. In fact, it was at the last institutional realm where it seems that some Mesoamerican artefacts began to be considered as art in their own right. In fact, this recognition seems to have been key for the establishment of a separate

gallery devoted to Pre-Columbian cultures. Interestingly enough, the guide to these displays published at the turn of the nineteenth century did explicitly recognise Pre-Columbian cultures as ancient empires on the path of civilisation since they had attained among other achievements the development of writing, calendar systems, art and science.

To summarise, early and middle nineteenth-century British and American displays structured Mesoamerica within the framework of the notion of ‘ancient civilisation’, by articulating ideas about urbanism, religious complexity, political and social institutions, calendar and writing systems and artistic valuation. They completed this formulation by associating Pre-Columbian cultures with other ancient civilisations through analogy, theories of cultural diffusionism, and integration in artistic schemes. Displays continuously and persistently articulated these ideas to representing the cultural complexity of Mesoamerican cultures from the 1820s to the 1870s. This leads to the last concluding remark of this chapter.

Indeed, the display representation of the notion of ‘ancient civilisation’ in nineteenth century object-based American and British displays depended on a limited number of structural elements, which functioned as conceptual units. However, there was a range of possibilities through which it was possible to articulate these conceptual units, whose operation was indeed determined by creativity and innovation. The communication between the producers and receptors of the displays depended on a delicate balance between the conventionality of the conceptual matter and the innovative character of the format. Nineteenth-century exhibitions on Mesoamerica were not exclusively devoted to the display of objects and collections, for there were other spectacles that showed urban, architectural and/or monumental remains related to these cultures. The distinctive representational strategies employed for these exhibits for the representation of Pre-Columbian cultures are the focus of analysis of the following chapter.

## CHAPTER 5

### Displaying Monuments

This chapter examines how Mesoamerican settlements, buildings and statues were represented in British and American exhibitions during the early to middle nineteenth century. For practical reasons, the term ‘monument’ is employed in this chapter to refer both to the group and to each of these urban, architectural and sculptural manifestations. Although distinctive in nature, they share a common characteristic: they are fixed in space, making them impossible to lift and carry and therefore, entirely different from portable objects and collections (Carman 2002: 44). Etymologically speaking, the notion ‘monument’ has long been related to features of the past; indeed, its roots come back to the notion of ‘memento’ or memory. However, during the nineteenth century, this term began to be increasingly used for large, fixed man-made structures that stood prominently on the landscape (Cf. Carman 2002: 46). On the basis of this general definition, this chapter uses the notion ‘monument’ to refer to evidence of built environments, architectural manifestations, and monumental sculptures produced during Pre-Columbian times, which were employed to articulate ideas about Mesoamerican cultures in British and American displays from the 1820s to the 1870s.

This chapter studies the ways in which architecture and sculpture represented Pre-Columbian societies for nineteenth-century British and American audiences. This analysis attempts to examine the rationale that lay at the core of the display-representations, showing their relationship to the intellectual development of anthropological thinking, particularly the history of archaeology. The study particularly emphasised contemporary debates that might have influenced the displays. It also explores how socio-political, philosophical and artistic agendas influenced the ideas articulated by the exhibits, thus supporting the thesis that no intellectual development can be extricated from the cultural framework from where it comes. Finally, it explores some aspects of the reception that these displays provoked in some members of the audience, who left records about their opinions and reactions in the printed press, journals, poetry, etc.

Two case studies will be analysed in the course of the present chapter. The first corresponds to William Bullock’s 1824 *Ancient Mexico* (hereafter *AM*). As explained before, this was a complex exhibition that included the presentation of casts of monumental sculpture, models, a setting recreation, and maps that combined with particular technologies of display, and served to articulate notions of monumentality, architecture, and urbanism. It will be shown that these ideas were at the core of an innovative representation of the Aztecs as a complex society in

cultural terms. The second case is related to the well-known 1840's expeditions of J. Stephens and F. Catherwood in Southwest Mexico and Central America. This corresponds to the display of a mock ruin on the shores of the Hudson River that incorporated Maya bas-reliefs brought by Stephens, which has passed throughout history with the name of *Cruger Island Monument*. The fascinating story of this monument and its interactions with American Romanticism, landscape painting and garden design will be examined in relationship with the consolidation of United States' nationalism, in order to show the manner in which Mesoamerica began to be incorporated within the notion of 'ancient civilisation' in a larger Western discourse of antiquity, particularly within the social context of middle nineteenth-century America.

The history of the representation of Mesoamerican monuments in Europe, and particularly in the United Kingdom and the United States, has not hitherto been the subject of systematic and comprehensive academic research. Some studies have indeed focused on the manner in which certain displays, or institutions, employed casts and models to represent Pre-Columbian sculpture and architecture for British and American audiences (e.g. Fane 1993, Graham 1993; Barnet-Sanchez 1993; Medina González 1998, 2003). However, this body of literature is partial in scope, and its conclusions intrinsically deficient. Focusing on particular displays, research has overlooked others. Hence, there is no analysis of the development of the phenomena already mentioned, or on their general historical trends. Investigators have also tended to approach the subject through historiography, rather than examining the manner in which these displays contributed to the formulation, representation and transmission of ideas about Mesoamerican cultures. This is the aim of this chapter, which additionally seeks to demonstrate that early and middle nineteenth-century British and American displays of Pre-Columbian monuments played a role in structuring the idea of Mesoamerica as an 'ancient civilisation' through the use of wider representational strategies.

The exhibitions examined in this chapter were not the first instances through which Britons and Americans became aware of the monumental heritage of Mesoamerica. Therefore, it is worth beginning with a brief summary of sixteenth-, seventeenth-, and eighteenth- century Western representations of Pre-Columbian settlements, buildings and sculpture, which although general in scope, emphasises some general trends.

## **5.1. BACKGROUND**

Europeans began to interpret Mesoamerican cities, architecture, and sculpture as soon as they encountered them, a phenomenon that originated during the sixteenth-century discovery and conquest of Pre-Columbian Mexico. Written texts regarding these subjects were then published in Europe, either as part of direct chronicles of the Spanish conquerors, reports of clergymen, civil servants, and occasional travellers. Later on, secondary sources and historical studies

formulated interpretations of Pre-Columbian monuments. These documents, which usually followed an ‘ethno-historical, ethnographic or linguistic’ approach (Bernal 1980: 35), are of interest for today’s archaeologist, although not always considered of an archaeological nature in their own right. This evaluation appears to be the result of a limited conceptualization of archaeology, which centres on its technical methods, particularly on the process of excavation. However, many of these documents not only employed material culture to approach the past, embracing thus the essential definition of archaeological epistemology; moreover, their narratives provided unique evidence for inferring the appearance, construction methods and functions of Mesoamerican monuments, as much as for understanding the manner in which Europeans perceived both them and the societies that built them.

The history of the visual representation of Mesoamerican monuments is yet to be written. Only few academic contributions have focused on this topic (i.e. Schavelzon 1983, Evans 2004; Medina-González 2009). However, it is worth pointing out that European representations of Pre-Columbian monuments are almost as old as their textual interpretations. Furthermore, the former continued to be produced and consumed by Europeans throughout the 1500s, 1600s, and 1700s (for general compilations see Keen 1973; Honour 1975; Tompkins 1976; Bernal 1980). Determining to what extent both these written and graphic sources were known in Britain and Colonial America at the time is, however, a difficult task. In comparison to Mesoamerican objects or collections (examined in Chapter 4), no systematic investigation has so far studied the historical impact of literary and visual representations of Mesoamerican monuments in British and American societies before the 1800’s. However, three indirect sources of information provide significant information about this phenomenon.

Historiography on early written and cartographic sources about the Americas (Keen 1973; Honour 1975; Kim 2006; Valencia Suárez 2009) has convincingly proved that from the early sixteenth century onwards, England saw not only the circulation of various manuscripts, printed books, and letters about the Aztecs, but also the production of maps representing their capital, Tenochtitlan. Subsidiary data related to collecting practices also bears witness that some sixteenth-, seventeenth-, and eighteenth- century well-known private, institutional or academic libraries contained (and made accessible to their readers) key primary and secondary sources about Mesoamerica, some of which contained illustrations (Cf. Hans Sloane Printed Book Catalogue, British Library 2010a).

In addition, information from the editorial production register shows that a large variety of written and visual materials about Mesoamerican monuments were printed in the British territories from the 1500s to 1700s (Cf. ESTC 2010). Particularly, publishing records demonstrate an increasing interest in Mesoamerica among British writers and readers throughout this period of time: from the mid-1600s onwards, some opera-plays, theatre scripts, and children’s literature focused on the subject of the Aztecs and their conquest (Boltarelli 1767;

Dryden 1741). However, it appears that it was during the second half of the seventeenth century that the Americas and its Pre-Columbian past became of wider interest among British and American readers, a phenomenon that can be measured by the multiple British editions that then appeared of three key philosophical treaties derived from the Enlightenment: G. Buffon's *Histoire Naturelle* (1785-1787), C. Du Pauw's *Recherches Philosophiques Sur les Américains* (1768, 1771) and T. Raynal's *A Philosophical and Political History of the Settlements and Trade of the Europeans in the East and West Indies* (1776). These *oeuvres* not only introduced the so-called 'New World Debate' into British academic circles, but they also influenced W. Robertson's *History of America* (1777), an editorial success that marked the climax of the British Enlightenment work about the Aztecs (Keen 1973: 275). Although this popularity was never reached by the English translation (1787) of Clavijero's *Storia Antica*, this work did help to increase academic interest in Mesoamerica within the British academy, a process that achieved its peak with the publication of A. Von Humboldt's *Vues des Cordillères et Monuments des Peuples Indigènes de l'Amérique* (1810). This work not only reawakened interest in New World antiquity by presenting new representations of their monuments, but also raised the study of these subjects to a high scientific level (Keen 1973: 336), winning the broadest impact on the public imagination of Europeans (Pratt 1992: 119).

No systematic research has hitherto analysed the above resources for analysing the manner in which Mesoamerican monuments were perceived in the United Kingdom and the United States during the sixteenth, seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. However, this general overview denies the claim that Britons and Colonial Americans had little awareness of, or interest, in Pre-Columbian Mesoamerica before the nineteenth century (Cf. Valencia-Suárez 2009). In fact, it appears that this body of written and visual information constituted the historical background of the representation of Mesoamerican monuments in British and American displays, a phenomenon that did not commence until the nineteenth century. In fact, it appears that England was the birthplace of the first exhibition that systematically represented Mesoamerican urbanism, architecture and sculpture into a single spectacle not only in Europe, but worldwide. This display was William Bullock's *Ancient Mexico*, the subject of the following section.

## **5.2. SCULPTURAL REPRODUCTIONS, ARCHITECTURAL RECONSTRUCTIONS AND URBAN CARTOGRAPHY: *ANCIENT MEXICO & ANCIENT AND MODERN MEXICO* (1824-1825)**

As explained in Section 4.2, William Bullock's *Ancient Mexico* (hereafter *AM*) was a multi-experience spectacle involving several technologies of display that interplayed for the dissemination of complex ideas about Aztec Culture. Apart from exhibiting the largest collection of original antiquities and Pre-Columbian Codices (either authentic documents or

copies) ever seen in Europe, *AM* occupies a prominent position in the history of Western museums. This was the first display that showed a map of Tenochtitlan, a reconstruction of a Pre-Columbian building, and a series of reproductions of Aztec monumental sculpture worldwide.

The importance of Pre-Columbian monuments for Bullock's three-dimensional representation of Mesoamerica can be measured on the basis of three facts. Not only did the casts of monumental sculpture occupy a dominant position in his 1824 display, as its panoramic view shows (Figure 11), but the whole exhibit was set in a gallery that was actually meant to resemble the interior of an Aztec architectural building. In addition, some reproductions of Pre-Columbian sculpture continued to be exhibited in 1825, when *Ancient Mexico* and *Modern Mexico* were incorporated into the single exhibition called *Ancient and Modern Mexico* (hereafter *AMM*) (Figure 12). Interestingly enough, when this exhibition closed, some of the casts were sold to renowned academic institutions of the time, evidence that confirms that Bullock's contemporaries considered three-dimensional representations of Mesoamerican monuments as valuable collectibles.

Previous academic literature has examined some aspects regarding the role that architecture and sculpture reproductions have played in the history of Mesoamerican displays, taking *AM* and *AMM* as case studies (Cf. Fane 1993, Medina-González 1998, 2003; Lopez Lujan 2009). However, until now there has been comprehensive analysis of the manner in which these elements contributed to structure the notion of 'ancient civilisation' at such an early stage of the nineteenth century, an aim that this section seeks to fulfil by initially analysing production issues.

### **5.2.1. Production**

*AM* employed different media and technologies of display to represent Mesoamerican monuments. Original maps and copies were employed to give an impression of the Aztec capital, thus presenting evidence of its urbanism. A model of a Pre-columbian pyramid and the recreation of the display setting as the 'Temple of Mexico' served to address issues regarding the development of architecture in Mesoamerica. Finally, Bullock produced reproductions of several monumental sculptures, which were in the time located in different places in Mexico City. Each of these elements involved different production processes, whose technical details require separate analysis in order to understand their particular significance.

#### ***Monumental Sculpture***

According to its guidebook (Bullock 1824b), *AM* exhibited four representations of Aztec sculpture, whose essential data has been compiled in Table 5.



<p style="text-align: center;"><b>Table 5</b>  <b>Representations of Monuments Presented at <i>Ancient Mexico</i> (1824)</b></p>			
<b>Name</b>	<b>Description given by the Catalogues</b>	<b>Location at <i>AM</i></b>	<b>Identification and present location</b>
Great Calendar Stone	The original was located in the Plaza Mayor. Bullock (1824b: 18) presented a detailed description of it, which was based in Antonio de León y Gama <i>Descripción Histórica Cronológica de las Dos Piedras</i> (1792)	The copy was hung on the principal wall of the gallery.	Cast of the Aztec Calendar, whose original is today on the Museo Nacional de Antropología in Mexico City (MNA) (Figure 19)
Idol of the Goddess of War Teoyamique	‘It measured about twelve feet high and four feet wide, located in the Galleries of the University’ (Bullock 1824b: 14)	At the entrance, on the left-hand side of the gallery.	Cast of Coatlicue, whose original is today on the MNA, Mexico City (Figure 20)
Great Sacrificial Stone	It was ‘ornamented on the surface with the representation of the Sun [...] and exhibited Mexican Warriors dragging their prisoners to sacrifice’ (Bullock 1824b: 27).	At the entrance, on the right-hand side of the gallery, in front of the Teoyamique.	Cast of Stone of Tizoc, whose original is today on display at the MNA Mexico City (Figure 21)
Serpent Head	Cast of Sculpture found on the corner of the Lottery Office, which –according to Bullock (1824b: 30)– ‘must have belonged to an Idol of at least seventy feet long’.	At the end of the gallery, on its left-hand side and to the left of the Stone of Tizoc.	Cast of Serpent Head, whose original is still part of the fabric in the Lottery Building in Mexico City
Serpent Goddess	Reconstruction based on a copy of a sculpture of the same size as the ‘Serpent Head’ found at the Dominican Temple that, according to Bullock (1824a: 23), ‘must have belonged to an idol of at least seventy feet’.	At the entrance, on the right-hand side of the gallery.	Reconstruction

As this table shows, four of the reproductions were life-size copies of three original monoliths – the Aztec Calendar, the Coatlicue and the Stone of Tizoc– (Figures 19, 20 & 21), which were at the time located in different places of Mexico City (for the history of these monuments see Matos 1992:96-98, 1998:19-20; Medina-González 1998, 1999).

Figures 19, 20 & 21. The ‘Calendar Stone’, the ‘Coatlicue’ and the ‘Stone of Tizoc’  
 (From Bernal 1980)

Bullock provided sufficient data regarding the rationale underlining the selection of these sculptures for the casting process both, in his *Six Months of Residence* and in the *AM* guidebook. On the basis of this information, Fane (1993: 156) has rightly concluded that ‘in selecting the objects to replicate, Bullock followed the steps of his great predecessor, Alexander Von Humboldt’. Indeed, the English showman clearly stated that the Prussian traveller had considered the Aztec Calendar, the Coatlicue and the Stone of Tizoc ‘of worthy notice to the antiquarian’ (Bullock 1824b: 15).

Yet Humboldt’s influence on the production of the reproductions of Aztec Sculpture for *AM* went beyond their selection process. The *Vues* (Humboldt {1810} 1979: 135-199, 223-226) presented both engravings and detailed descriptions of the Coatlicue, the Aztec Calendar and the Stone of Tizoc, thus providing valuable information regarding their characteristics and their locations. On account of this previous knowledge, Bullock (1825a: 109) was thus able, on arrival to Mexico City, to be ‘immediately prepared for making the casts of Aztec idols and sculptures’. Furthermore, the English showman (1824a:341-342) even replicated the actions of Humboldt by digging up the Coatlicue and reburying it on the grounds of the University (Bernal 1980: 85).

However, it is noteworthy that local authorities played a key role in facilitating negotiations with the holders of the monuments, in the erection of scaffoldings, and additional logistical procedures, as well as in the production of the moulds *in situ* (Bullock 1825: 324, 334). In addition, Humboldt’s visual and written information on the Aztec monoliths were based on works of two Novo-Hispanic antiquarians, Antonio de León y Gama (1792) and Captain Guillermo Dupaix (1834). Therefore, the production of Aztec reproductions for *AM* was also part of the complex historical process, so that this investigation has been called ‘symbiotic transculturation’ (see Chapter 4).

It appears that production of the moulds provoked a great deal of attention amongst Mexico City’s population, an opportunity that was skilfully vouched by the English showman to manifest his interest in the acquisition of antiquities. *Six Months of Residence* particularly reported that the exhumation of the Coatlicue provoked both the anger and the contempt of Mexican Créoles and Meztizos (Bullock 1825: 325). However, the indigenous population reacted in a different way, since attention and respect was shown towards the sculpture (Bullock 1824a: 341-342). Bullock even recorded the placing of offerings and the opinion of an old Indian, who said: ‘It is true that we have three very good Spanish Gods, but we might still have been allowed to keep a few of those of our ancestors’. The English showman not only took these manifestations as evidence of the persistence of heathen superstition among the descendants of the original inhabitants (Bullock 1824a: 341-342) but also incorporated these ideas into the narrative of the display. Therefore, the experiences gained by Bullock during the production of the reproductions in Mexico determined their representation in London. Thus, as Lowenthal (1985: 85) suggests, the resurrection of relics –either by digging, copying or displaying– became the

basis of a new metamorphosis, which in *AM* materialised ‘in making things one’s own [...] opened up the past for present and future use’.

Technological details about the production of the reproductions of the Aztec Calendar, the Coatlicue, and the Stone of Tizoc are unknown. However, it is likely that Bullock employed a variation of the casting technique that, Europeans had since the sixteenth century employed for the production of copies of Classical sculpture (Haskell & Penny 1981: 121), which consisted of two main phases:

- Fabrication of the Mould: this process involved the application of a viscose and malleable material, usually melted wax, directly onto the surface of the original, which had been previously covered usually with grease. This substance facilitated the separation of the mould from the original, a process that was carried out once the wax solidified constituting a hard mould that replicated the imprint of the negative relief register of the original sculpture, but lack its volume and weight, properties that facilitate its transportation.
- Casting Process: by filling the mould with a substance (usually plaster), the actual copy was produced, which reconstituted the actual volume and aspect of the original.

The use of this method was rather common at the beginning of the nineteenth century. In fact, Giovanni Battista Belzoni had previously used wax-moulds for the production of a plaster cast of the Tomb of the Pharaoh Seti I, a reproduction that was actually exhibited in 1821 at the Egyptian Hall (Pearce 2000: 111-112). However, it appears that Bullock was the first to use this technique for the reproduction of Mesoamerican sculpture.

By doing so, Bullock intrinsically increased the importance of and interest in Pre-Columbian sculpture: indeed, as Lowenthal (1985: 290) has proposed, copies not only make originals better known, they also alter our view of them, since casting an object is, to a large degree, an act of recognition of its significance. Moreover, analysing the technical considerations of the casting process provides deeper understanding of the value that Bullock ascribed to the three-dimensional representations of Mesoamerican sculpture. As Fane (1993: 152) has rightly pointed out, in contrast with the work at well-equipped in-door studios, producing field reproductions implied considerable danger and discomfort. Bullock may have actually reduced some, but not all, of the risks of *in situ* reproduction, by using wax moulds since these were more resistant and lighter than the gypsum moulds often employed in indoor casting (Haskel & Penny 1981: 121). However, wax moulds were considerably bulky and fragile, which implied challenges for transportation over long distances, such as that from Mexico to the United Kingdom. Therefore, and rather ironically, it seems that Bullock confronted less complications during the handling of original Mexican antiquities –all of them of relatively small size and weight– than during the production and transportation of the casts. In addition, the final production of the

reproductions implied further efforts in the casting process, a procedure that unfortunately was not documented by Bullock.

Taking the above information into account, it is not strange that Bullock never discriminated against casts and originals (Cf. Fane 1993: 146). Furthermore, plenty of evidence indicates that *AM* put into operation a combination of textual, visual and spatial technologies to communicate the importance of the casts to the visitors. For instance, the guidebook commenced the tour by presenting these elements and provided descriptions of them that were considerably longer and more detailed than those belonging to the other items on display (Bullock 1824: 3). In the actual display, the monumental casts constituted dominant features, not only due to their size, but also because they occupied key positions in the general arrangement of the gallery. In fact, these elements functioned as markers of the rather symmetrical ordering of the exhibit, a framework that was followed by the placement of the other antiquities and contents of the collection. In addition, Aglio's panoramic view depicted several visitors either staring or pointing to the cast reproductions of Pre-Columbian monuments (Figure 11).

Interestingly enough, neither the *AM* guidebook (1824b: 23) nor the display articulated any strategy to differentiate reproductions from original antiquities. However, this cannot be considered an exclusive trait of *AM*. Rather, such a non-discriminative attitude originated from a complex historical phenomenon that operated both at regional and local scales. Indeed, ever since the sixteenth century, famous European private collections and museums contained casts of antique sculpture that were considered as precious as their originals (Haskell & Penny 1981: 121). Furthermore, the equivalence between authentic sculpture and their reproductions was reinforced during the late eighteenth century and the early nineteenth century by the British upper classes who, as part of a historical movement known as 'Marble Mania', enjoyed collecting and exhibiting Classical sculptures, without making any distinction between authentic works, reproductions, or neo-classical reinterpretations (Cf. Guilding 2001).

From the Renaissance onwards, the re-use of Classical statues have ranged from faithful copying to fundamental transformations of the originals (Lowenthal 1985: 80). Bullock followed this long-standing tradition in the creation of casts, thus altering the representation of Mesoamerican sculpture at *AM*. Both conceptually and technologically speaking, the moulding process aims to generate a strict duplicate of the original: the faithfulness of the copy actually relies on the accuracy achieved through the manufacturing relationship between the mould and the original. However, during the casting process, the final reproduction can be altered in various degrees, thus affecting the way in which the copy represents the original. A subtle example of this was Bullock's reproduction of the Great Calendar Stone. The original sculpture consisted (and still consists) of a monolithic piece of irregular form, which was almost completely carved to form a circular composition, yet leaving some of the borders in a rough state. Accordingly, the display guidebook referred to that 'part of the *un-sculptured* stone in which [the composition] is cut, and

which still remains attached to it' (Bullock 1824b: 7, *my emphasis*). However, the panoramic view of *AM* clearly shows this monument reproduction was slightly modified, eliminating the 'un-sculptured' areas. No information is available regarding the reasons that motivated this alteration. However, Bullock might have tried to embellish the aspect of the sculpture, since the resulting cast showed a sculpture carved into a perfect circular shape.

A more extreme example of the malleability of the casting process was 'The Serpent Goddess'. Academic interest in this reconstruction has invariably led to strong criticisms. For instance, Fane (1993: 158) has stated that the Serpent Goddess 'clearly illustrates the problems that arise when distinctions between casts, reproductions and reconstructions are glossed over'. However, such an evaluation seems far from being historically rigorous, since the guidebook of *AM* differentiated the Serpent Goddess from the rest of the reproductions, by stating that the former was a 'copy' (Bullock 1824b: 24). Although the use of this term may appear misleading from our present understanding of the term, it seems that Bullock was well aware of both the potentialities and the limitations of presenting reproductions in the displays: he explained that the imitation of any object was 'as faithful as the most devoted and scrupulous care *could* make it' (Bullock 1825b: 10, *my emphasis*). Accordingly, the *AM* guidebook attempted to justify the act of reconstruction, by explaining that the Serpent Goddess was based on the idea that the Serpent Head had originally 'belonged to an idol of at least seventy feet long, probably {located} in the Great Temple.' (Bullock 1824b: 30).

Additional criticism has been made regarding the complete shape of the sculpture. To begin with, it has been argued that no archaeological sculpture of this shape, form, or style had come to light so far, which meant that Bullock produced a 'puzzle', perhaps reversing the composition of the serpent columns of Chichen Itza (Lucas 1921 in Fane 1993: 158). However, no evidence suggests that the English traveller ever visited this Mayan site. Alternatively, it is noteworthy that in his travelogue, Bullock (1825:23) contended that the Dominican Temple in Mexico exhibited a sculpture of a serpent 'coiled up in an irritated position, with the jaws extended, and in the act of gorging a well dressed female, who appears in the mouth of the enormous reptile, crushed

and lacerated'. Due to their similarities, Fane (1993: 158) has proposed that this sculpture was the model for the Serpent Goddess. Nevertheless, no record of this exemplar has been found. However, amongst his collection of Mexican antiquities, Bullock held a small sculpture in the form of a serpent that was shaped into a head-up position (Figure 22). Regardless of the fact that the elongation of this sculpture's neck did not fully correspond to that of the Serpent Goddess,

Figure 22. Sculpture of a serpent  
collected by Bullock  
(From McEwan 1994)

it is likely that this element served as the inspiration for designing the general shaping of the reconstruction. Formal considerations also suggest that the upper portion of the Serpent Goddess was an altered version of the Serpent Head cast. Therefore, the whole reconstruction of the Serpent Goddess was partly based on material evidence, partly derived from speculation, and partly drawn from the casting process. In this sense, it can be better described as a creative palimpsest, a form of representing archaeological material culture was also employed by Bullock for displaying Mesoamerican architecture at *AM*.

### ***Architecture***

Kirshenblatt-Gimblett (1998: 18) has developed the notion of ‘the poetics of detachment’ to refer not only to ‘the physical act of producing fragments, but also to the detached attitude that makes fragmentation and its appreciation possible’. Furthermore, she has posed the intriguing idea that the presentation of fragments provokes ‘the pleasure of imagining the complete unity’ (Kirshenblatt-Gimblett 1998: 18).

*AM* could be considered an early example of the poetics of detachment in display production. This process commenced with the collecting of fragments: in Mexico, Bullock acquired objects of different nature and variable characteristics from usually unknown origins, which very unlikely to have belonged to the same place or context. Once in London, the English showman employed a range of strategies that aimed to stimulate the imagination (and the pleasure) of visitors in reconstructing a type of Pre-Columbian architecture in his display.

The whole production of *AM* was achieved through the formulation of a larger and more comprehensive palimpsest. As described above, this process began in Mexico, where Bullock (1824a: 113) visited archaeological sites and collected engravings of Mesoamerican buildings. On the basis of this knowledge, once in London, Bullock manufactured a coherent unity into the form of an architectural space: a Mesoamerican religious building. As explained before, the guidebook announced that the Great Gallery of the Egyptian Hall was refurbished in order to recreate the interior of a ‘Temple of Mexico’ (Bullock 1824b: 3). Section 4.2.1 has already explained the manner in which Bullock created this sense of place by the juxtaposition of architectural features, ornamentation, spatial arrangements and the articulation of the narratives of display. However, it is worth examining how the exhibition of the casts contributed to this effect. According to the *AM* guidebook, the Stone of Tizoc was presented with the name of the ‘Great *Sacrificial* Stone’ (Bullock 1824b: 39, my emphasis). The cast of this sculpture was placed in front of the Teoyamique, the goddess in front of which, according to the catalogue, ‘thousands of victims were annually sacrificed’ (Bullock 1824b: 41). This configuration was associated with a collection of knives that, as explained in Chapter 4, were interpreted as tools for performing human sacrifice (Bullock: 1825b: 29). Bullock had no shred of evidence to

assume that the sculptures and artefacts had ever been associated with the practice of human sacrifice or had ever been placed in a single location. However, the visual, spatial and written technologies ‘naturalised’ the relationships of these items to formulate the illusion that they had together participated in the dynamics of a specific sacred place during Pre-Columbian times.

It would be misleading to state that the whole set up of *AM* resulted from pure speculation, though. Thanks to Leon y Gama’s *Descripción* (1792), a document extensively quoted in the *AM* guidebook, we know Bullock (1825b: 27) was aware that the Aztec Calendar, the Teoyamique, and the Great Calendar Stone had been discovered in the central square of Mexico City, an area that had once been occupied by the ceremonial centre of Tenochtitlán. Therefore, through an act of creativity that aimed to simulate the past, Bullock articulated the idea that these sculptures belonged to a Pre-Columbian temple.

Religious Mesoamerican architecture was also presented in *AM* through the exhibition of another type of reproduction: a ‘Model of a Temple’ (Bullock 1824b: 24). The appearance of this element in the panoramic view of *AM*, as well as the textual and visual information provided by *Six Months of Residence* (Bullock 1824a: 412-413), indicates that this model was a miniature reconstruction of the Pyramid of the Sun of the archaeological site of Teotihuacán, located in today’s Estado de Mexico (Figure 23).



Figure 23. Model of the Pyramid of Teotihuacan displayed in *Ancient Mexico* (From Bullock 1824b)

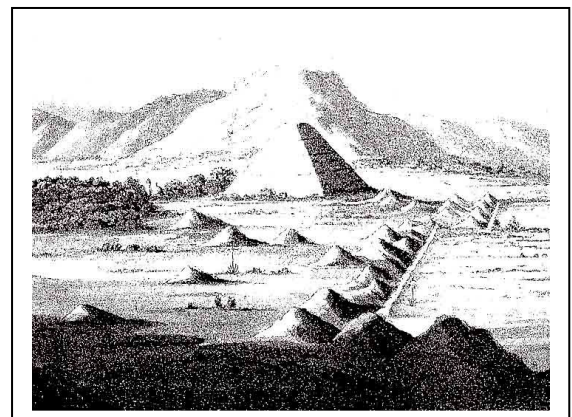


Figure 24. Detail of the engraving of the Pyramid of Teotihuacan by Bullock Jr (Bullock 1824a: 410-411)

Teotihuacán –a site that flourished almost 1,000 years before the development of Aztec culture– holds an ancient, long-standing and central place in the history of Mexican archaeology. Its importance has for more than 300 years inspired both foreigners and locals to visit it, to write about it, to undertake research on it, and to produce a large corpus of textual and visual records, information that still awaits a systematic analysis (Bernal 1980: 51-151; Schavelzón 2009). Among Teotihuacán admirers, Humboldt occupies a prominent place, for regardless the fact that he never visited this site (Labastida 1999: 268), he produced an extensive analysis of the

site, including its most prominent monument: the Pyramid of the Sun (Humboldt 1974: 43-53). This information was disseminated amongst Americans and Europeans on a larger scale than ever before due to the popularity and reputation of Humboldt's *Vues* (1810).

However, only recently has it been recognised that local *intelligentsia* greatly contributed to Humboldt's study of Teotihuacán. For instance, Juan José de Oteyza (1777-1810) provided the Prussian scientist the results of his topographic survey of the site (Gallegos 1997: 100, n. 27; Humboldt 1974: 42-58, 1984: 124-127). Additionally, Humboldt's *Political Essay* (1811) reported on the archaeological work of Sigüenza y Góngora regarding the excavation, origin and function of the pyramids of Teotihuacán (Bernal 1980: 50, Garcíadueñas 1988: 49-50). Since Bullock became aware of Oteyza and Sigüenza's information about Teotihuacán through Humboldt's work, it appears that the rationale underlining the production of the 'Model of Temple' for *AM* was part of a process of 'symbiotic transculturation'.

Very little is known about the technical procedures employed by Bullock for the production of this model. However, this was manufactured on the basis of data collected *in situ*. *Six months of Residence* briefly described Bullock's trip to Teotihuacán, explaining that he and his son sat on top of its pyramids 'to contemplate the scene of ancient wonders' (Bullock 1824a: 412-413).

This experience surely determined the design of the model: Bullock Jr. drew a view of the site 'on the spot' (Bullock 1824a: 413), which was later engraved for publication in Bullock's travelogue (Figure 24). The 'Model of a Temple' was surely inspired by this engraving. According to the panoramic view of *AM*, the reconstruction replicated the general shape of the Pyramid of the Sun depicted by Bullock Jr., but modified the size of the real structure and emphasised its geometric lines, effects that require further examination.

Technologically speaking, models constitute a representational alternative for what is unfeasible to be reproduced at actual size. Furthermore, from a conceptual perspective, models are a derivation of what Elnser (1994: 162) called 'the microscopic method': they constitute scaled-down representations that implicitly stand for objects of larger magnitude. Thus, by producing a model for the representation of the Pyramid of the Sun, Bullock was implying the grandeur of the real building. In addition, models are generally produced to be copies of their originals: the act of modelling implies a degree of accuracy regarding the model and the object that it reproduces. Hence, by presenting the scaled-down representation of the Pyramid of Teotihuacán as a model, Bullock also emphasised its faithfulness to reality. In order to emphasise this effect, *AM* employed a subtle literary strategy: its guidebook contended that the model had been produced 'on the spot' (Bullock 1824b: 23). Due to practical considerations, it is rather unlikely that this was true. However, such a statement serves to stress the immediacy of the travelling experience as a source of truthfulness, and in turn, to emphasise the accuracy of the reconstruction in the display. Therefore, by exhibiting the 'Model of a Temple' in *AM*,



Bullock presented material evidence of the greatness of Pre-Columbian architecture. It is noteworthy that, through Humboldt's writings ([1810] 1974: 43-53) and Bullock's personal visit to Teotihuacán (Bullock 1824a: 412-413), Bullock was aware that Mesoamerican buildings did not stand on their own but rather belonged to larger settlements. Interestingly enough, the production of *AM* also involved the presentation of items representing Pre-Columbian urbanism.

### ***Urbanism***

As explained in Chapter 4, during his Mexican venture, Bullock collected both originals and copies of Pre-Columbian Codices. Among these, there were some cartographic documents, whose general details are summarised in the Table 6:

<b>Table 6</b> <b>Cartographic Documents exhibited in <i>Ancient Mexico</i></b>	
<b>Description</b>	<b>Identification</b>
'Unique map of the ancient city of Mexico made by order of Montezuma ( <i>sic</i> ) for Cortes to send to the King of Spain (Bullock 1824b: 32).	Engraving of ' <i>Plano Parcial de la Ciudad de México</i> ' made in 1793 by Diego García del Conde (Medina González 1998: 6).
'Part of a large map, showing rivers, mountains, temples [... which] emits smoke or flames' (Bullock 1824c: 31).	Second fragments of the Códice Huamantla (Glass 1964: 22, 86, in Medina González 1998: 6).
'An original map, on Indian Paper... It shows the situation of the said Imperial City... the barbarous and gentile kings, as well as Christian Caciques who governed it' (Bullock 1824c: 47-48).	<i>Plano de Papel Magney</i> that pictured the northern Barrio de Tlatelolco of Mexico City (Glass 1964 22-39, in Medina-González 1998: 6)
'Map, on leather; it is believed to represent the attack by Mexicans on the city of Tlaxcalla' (Bullock 1824c:50).	This may be the so-called <i>Códice de la Cueva</i> (Glass 1964: 22, 45, in Medina González 1998: 6).

The process of acquisition of these and other Pre-Columbian Codices exhibited in *AM* has been explained in Chapter 4. Suffice to say that some of them belonged to the Mexican government, whereas others apparently were acquired from private owners. No information indicates why and how these documents were put on display. Regardless of this lack of data, it is worth considering that these documents and their descriptions at the *AM* guidebook tended to emphasise two main topics: Mesoamerican cities and their destruction.

*AM* articulated the presentation of Mesoamerican cities employing both visual and textual narratives, which actually complemented each other. Both the *Plano Parcial* and the *Plano de Papel Magney* provided key visual data on the complexity of Mesoamerican urban settlements, by showing the large extent of Tenochtitlán, its organised urban pattern along three main causeways, and some characteristics of the city infrastructure, its central plaza and surrounding

buildings. The narrative of the guidebook went together with these graphic aids, by providing a detailed and long description of the Aztec capital, based on Hernán Cortés and Bernal Díaz del Castillo's chronicles (Bullock 1824b: 2-3). These narratives addressed the enormous size of Tenochtitlán, its organised layout, and the diverse streets and 'barrios' that formed it.

Bullock framed the presentation of data about Pre-Columbian urbanism in temporal categories. As explained in Chapter 4, *AM* employed a series of strategies for periodisation in order to recreate the idea of an ancient past. The introduction of the guidebook contributed to this by presenting a dramatic account of the Spanish conquest, which implicitly expressed the fall of the Aztec Empire, and thus created a sense of remoteness and limitation regarding Mexican antiquity. Thus, the end of ancient Mexico was textually recreated by pointing out the destruction of Mesoamerican urban populations, architecture and sculptural monuments. Hence, Bullock (1824b:2) affirmed that the Spanish Conquerors had 'left the [Aztec] capital and other popular cities [...] in ruins [...] the temples [...] demolished, the idols [...] broken and buried'.

The above information clearly indicates that Bullock spent considerable effort and resources in the production of visual and textual aids for the presentation of Pre-Columbian cities, and its architectural and sculptural manifestation in *AM*. The way in which the representation of Mesoamerican monuments was articulated throughout the display, as well as its significance, will be analysed in the following section.

### **5.2.2. Representation**

According to its guidebook, *AM* (Bullock (1824b: 38) tried to combine 'in the best manner' all its elements in order 'to illustrate the ancient capital, its monuments, religion, inscriptions, feelings and customs'. In truth, the exhibition pursued no thematic sections for the representation of each of these topics. Rather it proceeded by means of a general and comprehensive overview, in which particular subjects were addressed in combination with variable extension and depth. Diverse modes of display were employed for different representational purposes. As was shown in Chapter 4, Aztec religion, inscriptions, and customs were topics largely articulated through objects and collections in the display. In comparison, documentary sources, architectural features and sculptural elements were employed for formulating the themes of 'the ancient city and its monuments'. Therefore, the representation of Mesoamerican monuments involved the integration of a complex network of written, visual and spatial representational strategies. An example of this can be found by analysing the manner in which *AM* represented Tenochtitlán, and by derivation, Mesoamerican urbanism.

In order to 'introduce the visitor to the antiquities presented in the display', Bullock (1824b: B) first provided a long description of the Aztec capital, which was based on a 'letter that Hernán

Cortés [had] sent to the King of Spain'. Both eyewitness and historical authority vouched for this account, which emphasized the large expanse of Tenochtitlan –calculated to be 'as large as Cordova and Sevilla'– with its dense population, its complex urban organization, its solid architecture and the magnitude of its buildings (Bullock 1824a: 4). The catalogue also quoted the work of the Spanish Conqueror, Bernal Díaz del Castillo, who described the walls of the city built of 'lime and stone', the large squares covered by stone pavement, and the palaces of Moctezuma, (including the luxury of their interiors) (Bullock 1824a:4).

Bullock provided ample visual evidence for supporting the written description of Tenochtitlán as presented by the guidebook. A 'unique map of the ancient city of Mexico made by order of Montezuma (*sic*) for Cortes to send to the King of Spain' was described as 'a convincing document of the regularity and extent of the capital' (Bullock 1824a: 4). Furthermore, it depicted 'accurately and minutely' the city's 'numerous streets, canals and temples' (Bullock 1824a: 4). Two other maps confirmed the urban layout of Tenochtitlán and its principal buildings. *AM* represented Mesoamerican architecture first and foremost by the display setting: the recreation of the 'Temple of Mexico'. By superimposing ornamentation and décor to the interior design of the Egyptian Gallery, Bullock created a magnificent image of a Pre-Columbian building: a large and ample construction, built on solid materials, and composed by complex architectural features, such as columns.

By articulating such representations of Mesoamerican cities and its architecture, *AM* implicitly qualified Aztec society. As explained in Chapter 2, urbanism and stone architecture had been for a long time structural components of the notion of 'civilisation' in Western thought. Hence, through the combination of a series of display strategies, *AM* clearly represented Aztecs as an advanced and complex culture. The significance of this representation cannot be overlooked, for it shows that Bullock was indeed participating in a long-standing intellectual debate on the history of Mesoamerican archaeology.

The origins of this debate, whose details are reviewed in Appendix III, can be traced back to the sixteenth century. According to Levin-Rojo (2001: 39-52), the singularity of the encounter of Europe with the Aztecs –a phenomenon termed the 'Mexican paradox'– laid on the fact that the conqueror's 'feeling of alienation before native peoples was attenuated by partial recognition', which meant that Mesoamerican societies were found comparable to their own in sociopolitical and cultural terms. Two of the elements were central for the conformation of the 'Mexican Paradox': the presence of Pre-Columbian cities and complex architecture.

During the following two centuries, many European scholars continued to elaborate on the notion of Pre-Columbian 'cities' and 'civility' in order to emphasise the Mesoamerican social sophistication (Cf. Appendix III). However, they often added to this equation ideas related to complex social organization (Acosta [1598, 1604, 1616, 1717] 1940: 251; Torquemada [1615]

1943: 243). Hence, it could be argued that from the 1500s to at least the mid 1700s, many Europeans recognised not only that Pre-Columbian societies had achieved complex urban and architectural features, but also that these developments were evidence of the establishment of advanced social institutions, including political and judicial systems, all of them traits that confirmed the cultural sophistication of Mesoamerican cultures.

This state of affairs experienced a significant shift during the late eighteenth century as part of the so-called 'New World Dispute'. Indeed, following the thesis of a young, immature and intrinsically inferior America posed by the naturalist Georges Louis Leclerc, Comte de Buffon (1707-1784) (Gerbi 1993: 3), numerous *philosophers* not only brought scepticism regarding the sophistication of Pre-Columbian urbanism and architecture, but they also employed these arguments to deny the cultural complexity of Mesoamerican cultures (Cf. Keen 1984: 271-276). A variation of this trend was Robertson's model of cultural progression, which clearly determined that the scales of development on both urbanism and architecture were indeed markers of 'civilisation'. Robertson (1777: III: 277) accepted not only that Mexicans had built cities, but also that the number and the size of these populations were indicative of the progress of this Mesoamerican society. On the basis of this data, Robertson proposed that Mexicans were 'polished states' that had achieved a considerable development towards civilisation, although they were still inferior in respect to the peoples of the Old World (Robertson 1777: III: 278). To substantiate the later arguments, the *History of America* (1777: III: 285) supported the 'Black Legend': it claimed that Pre-Columbian cities had never been as populated and magnificent as the Spanish invaders had reported. It also proposed that Pre-Columbian architecture was extremely simple: Tenochtitlán was composed by 'a number of low straggling huts, scattered about irregularly [...] built in turf and stone and thatched with reeds'. Mesoamerican buildings were not solid or magnificent, but rather 'fitted to be the habitation of men just emerging from barbarity' (Robertson 1777: III: 316-319). As additional evidence of the lack of 'any progress in the art of building' among Mexicans, Robertson (1777: III: 314-425) argued that there was no 'monument or vestige of any building more ancient than the conquest' not only in Mexico City but in other areas of the New Spain that had not suffered the devastation of the Spanish invasion. The impact of these interpretations on Anglo-Saxon readers cannot be underestimated since the *History of America* was re-edited at least ten times in Britain from the 1780's to the 1820's (see British Library Catalogue).

The more influential interpretation of Mesoamerican monuments immediately before the opening of *AM* was Von Humboldt's work that gained the 'broadest impact on the public imaginations of Europe and Euroamerica' (Pratt 1992: 119), an effect that was partly due to the profusion of visual recordings of Pre-Columbian monuments ever before published. Humboldt's perceptions of Mesoamerican architecture were first and foremost expressed by the very title of the *Vues* and of some of these engravings: Pre-Columbian buildings were

‘monuments’, i.e. material evidence of the past. In addition, all the images provided visual evidence of the complex fabric of the structures, their solid materials and their monumental scale. Therefore, Humboldt combined visual and textual strategies to contradict the core of Du Pauw’s and Robertson’s argumentations regarding the lack of complexity of Mesoamerican architecture. For example, the engraving of the *Pyramid of Cholula* (Figure 25) integrated an old or ancient construction into a picturesque perspective served to stressed the ‘monumental’ character of Pre-Columbian architecture, creating a sense of ‘retrospective wonder’ as well as inspiring nostalgia and inspiration for historical recovery (Lowenthal 1985: 137, 174). By presenting the Pre-Columbian structure in its actual condition, it also stimulated imagination on its primal state. It also evoked a haunting sense of temporal remoteness and historical rupture, by showing that Mesoamerican architecture had changed after the Spanish (Christian) invasion, an event that was signalled by depicting a church at the top of Cholula’s pyramid. The accompanying explanatory essay emphasised issues relating to time, particularly the chronology of Mesoamerica, which according to Humboldt (1980: II: 41-43) began in the seventh century.

Figure 25. *The Pyramid of Cholula*  
(From Humboldt 1980: II: 7)

Humboldt’s chronology regarding Mesoamerican antiquity was not new (Cf. Las Casas 1993: 189). However, the innovation of the Prussian traveller relied on providing scientific evidence to contradict the opinion of the Enlightenment *philosophers*, who had sustained the idea that, from the physical point of view, America was indeed newer than the Old World, a statement that indirectly served to deny the possibility of a deep Mesoamerican antiquity (Gerbi 1993: 3-20). In fact, on the basis of stratigraphic, paleontological and geographical empirical data, Humboldt (1980: I: 11) was the first to scientifically prove the geological unity of the Earth. His essay on the ‘Pyramid of Cholula’ in fact suggested that Mexican antiquity was as old as the European ancient past: it stated that the construction of this monument began ‘before the establishment of Northern European cultures’ (Humboldt 1980: II: 43). Thus, Humboldt’s ‘planetary consciousnesses’ served to contextualise Mesoamerican antiquity on a temporal, global scale

Pratt 1992: 111-113). Indeed, his reinvention of American archaeology depended greatly on proposing cultural analogies between the New World indigenous cultures and ancient European civilisations. Indeed, as Keen (1973: 33) pointed out, his evolutionary framework recognised that Pre-Columbian societies were of historical and physiological interest because they represented a ‘picture of the uniform progress of the mankind’. This perspective was another innovation by Humboldt to the history of American Archaeology: the comparative framework of the *Vues* broke a long-established European ethnocentricity of scholarly studies about ancient cultures (Medina González 1998: 63).

As explained before, the production of *AM* was greatly influenced by Humboldt’s works. However, the display representation responded to the wider intellectual debate regarding the nature and significance of Mesoamerican monuments. For instance, the guidebook employed and gave authority to Cortes’ and Díaz del Castillo’s chronicles for representing the complexity and splendour of Tenochtitlán at the display. In addition, since Bullock had several Mesoamerican sites during his Mexican venture (Cf. Medina-González 1998: 55), his travelogue decided to confront the views of the *philosophers*, stating:

Had Monsieur De Pauw, or our better informed country man Robertson, passed one hour in Texcuco, Texcozingo or Huexotla, they would never have supposed ... that the palace of Moctezuma [...] was a clay cottage (Bullock 1824a: 420).

The guidebook of *AM* supported Bullock’s authority on Mesoamerican subjects by reinforcing the validity of the travelling experience as a source of knowledge. This was done by expressing the empiricist idea that:

The statement of an eyewitness must ever be preferable than those conjectural accounts of modern historians who never having visited the country, nor heard of the still remaining vestiges of its former greatness, have tended to mislead the world on the subject. Among these, no author is more mistaken than [...] Robertson whose well-written volume contains no information of the former state of America (Bullock 1824c: 5, 1825b: 21).

In fact, this cohesive discourse not only enhanced Bullock’s authority, but it also validated the literary resources that he employed to describe ancient Mexican monuments at the display. Accordingly, the guidebook not only described Cortés and Díaz del Castillo as ‘eyewitnesses’ of the Aztec world and its conquest but also stated their narrations were vouched with veracity and accuracy since Bullock (1825b: 21) had ‘frequent opportunities to putting [them] to test’. In addition, the guidebook quoted Humboldt’s description *of* Teotihuacán, which testified that ‘streets in exact lines’ formed the urban setting of this site, whose constructions were made of ‘a nucleus [...] composed of clay mixed with small stones [...] encased by a thick wall of tezontli’. Furthermore, considering that ‘some of the best informed persons had indeed heard of [these monuments], but supposing M. Humboldt had been imposed on, and taken his description of others who had not themselves seen them,’ the catalogue presented an account of

Bullock's (1824b: 35) personal visit to Teotihuacán. This narration ratified the regular urban layout of this site and referred to the hard materials employed for the construction of its monuments.

Visual and spatial strategies complemented textual language to articulate and support Bullock's representation regarding Mesoamerican monuments at *AM*. Indeed, the aspect of the setting-recreation of the Temple of Mexico was far from Robertson's (1777: III: 90) description of this structure as a 'solid mass of earth, partially covered with stone'. Nevertheless, the most significant evidence of complex Pre-Columbian architecture presented at *AM* was the 'Model of a Temple', which as explained before, was a miniature three-dimensional representation of the Teotihuacán Pyramid of the Sun.

Section 5.2.1 has already exposed the way in which every presentation of this model implied effects of accuracy and of grandeur regarding its original. However, it is worth pointing out that spatial strategies reinforced the association between the idea of 'monumentality' and the character of Mesoamerican architecture. As shown in the panoramic view of *AM* at the exhibit grounds (Figures 11 and 23), the model of the Pyramid of the Sun was elevated on a stand: this position forced visitors to look up towards the model, an optical effect that contributed to the magnification of its size.

Displaying a model also implied a valuation of Mesoamerican buildings, for as Elsner (1994: 171) has suggested, 'models memorize famous monuments'. In fact, the guidebook was quite explicit on the significance of the monument reproduced by the model, by stating that the Pyramid of the Sun was considered 'the most extraordinary of the antiquities that survived the Conquest' (Bullock 1824b: 4). This estimation was surely inspired by Humboldt's writings that praised Teotihuacán with eloquent words (Medina González 2003: 114). However, Bullock's statement on the significance of the Teotihuacán pyramids deserves further consideration since it addresses the issue of dating. By employing the word 'antiquities' and referring to its pre-Colonial origin, the guidebook operated a representational strategy that added time-depth. This was further supported by the exhibition of the scaled-down reproduction of the Pyramid of Teotihuacán since, as it has been convincingly argued, conceptually speaking models 'freeze in material form in the here and now the desire for lost or distant grandeur' (Elsner 1994: 164).

Architectural models were highly praised by Bullock's contemporaries. At the beginning of the nineteenth century, the British architect John Soane (1753-1837), who displayed several models of Classical buildings in his private museum in London, clearly expressed the powerful effect that models were thought to produce:

Large models, faithful to the originals, not only in form and construction, but likewise to various colors and materials would produce sensations and impressions of the highest kind, far beyond the powers of description and surpassed only by contemplation of the buildings themselves. In

addition, moulds are meant to explain [...] different modes of construction (Soane 1929: 191 in Elsner 1994:164).

It appears that Bullock concurred with these views, since *AM* recognized the value of the model by placing it in a prominent position in the display, which as much as the monumental casts, served as the organizational framework for the arrangement of the rest of the collection. Even though the display guidebook provided no details about the fabric of original monument (or of the aims that motivated its representation by a model), we can infer the function of the latter at the display: Bullock (1816a: 140) was neither an architect nor an academic, but his exhibitions were meant to instruct as well as entertain. Thus, it can be speculated that by using a model for the representation of the Pyramid of the Sun, *AM* sought to invite the visitor to reflect on the architectural techniques developed during Pre-Columbian times.

The model of the Pyramid of Teotihuacán was also a key feature for the representation of Mesoamerica within a Humboldtian framework of ‘planetary consciousness’. As Sloane (1929: 191 in Elsner 1994: 164) had previously proposed it, the guidebook of *AM* used the model to make a comparative analysis of modes of construction following a cross-cultural fashion, which actually resulted in stressing analogies between the New World and the Old World’s ancient cultures. Chapter 4 has already pointed out that Bullock found a series of similarities between Egyptian and Pre-Columbian material culture, which served to suggest a common origin. The representation of the model not only contributed to this argument, but it actually became a fruitful terrain for postulating correlations between the pyramids of Teotihuacán and those located at Giza. This was done with four strategies that, combining textual and visual technologies, created connections and justified them within a framework of scientific rigor:

- Reference to size: As scaled-down representations, models required a reference to the dimensions that they are meant to represent. For models of buildings, a common point of reference is, of course, that of the human body (i.e. the observer). However, *AM* suggested the actual size of the Teotihuacán pyramids by ‘approaching the unfamiliar through the familiar’, a classic move towards cross-cultural encounters (Pagdem 1993: 21). Hence, the guidebook proposed that the former monuments were ‘scarcely inferior to that of Cairo’ (Bullock 1824b: 33). No exact dimensions were given in any case. Nevertheless, through the evocations of an already known prototype of grandeur, the model showed that Pre-Columbian architecture was comparable to the monumental vestiges of another ancient culture.
- Reference to form: The guidebook pointed out that the form of the Great Pyramid of Teotihuacán had a square shape as regular as that of the Great Egyptian pyramid (Bullock 1824:34). Apart from naming the monuments with similar



denotations, which increased the effect of its similarity, noting formal analogies served to create further cultural connections. Such an argument was particularly viable for early nineteenth century antiquarians, for at this time, formal analysis in architecture –identification of similarities between types, forms and features– was commonly employed to trace relationships between cultures, as well as to establish hypotheses regarding their development in history. For instance, Maurice (1800 in Curl 1994: 94) argued that ‘India, with its zoomorphic deities, pyramid temples and decorative motifs had derived religion and architecture from Egypt’. Similarly, in his written travelogue, Bullock (1824a: 394) had claimed that the religion, traditions and architecture of Texcoco resembled those of ‘the enlightened nation of Africa’. The recreation of the Mexican temple superimposed to the original ornamentation of the ‘Great Egyptian Hall’ also contributed to this effect, since the blend of the two decorative schemes contributed to the creation of a visual link between Aztec and Egyptian aesthetics.

- References to urban layout: Observing that the monuments of Teotihuacán were aligned to the Earth’s meridians and parallels, Humboldt (1984: 126) had reported that the British traveler Richard Pococke (1704-1765) had noted a similar alignment in the pyramids of Giza. The guidebook of *AM* followed this line of thought, by further adding that the small structures that encircled the Pyramid of the Sun were organized similarly to those that stood near the pyramids of Cheops and Mykerinos in Egypt. Such a landscape analogy served to further articulate a fourth strategy, which made reference to historical events.
- Historical association. The guidebook of *AM* provided a large, romanticized account of the sixteenth century Spanish Conquest of the Aztecs, including the defeat of indigenous military forces in Otumba, a town near Teotihuacán. None of the sources quoted by this text –the writings of the conquerors and historians, such as Hernán Cortés (1777), Bernal Díaz del Castillo (1800) or Clavijero (1780)– reported that the Spanish troops had passed by the Teotihuacán Pyramids. Nevertheless, Bullock (1824b: 33) associated both events, by stating, ‘I believe that from the top of one of these [pyramids], Cortés notices the arrival of the enemy’s army’. Although, there is no direct evidence, it is possible that this claim was but an evocation of the events recorded at the Battle of the Pyramids of Giza fought by Napoleon’s army in July 1798, a link that persisted through the first half of the nineteenth century (Medina-González 2003: 124).

The casts of Pre-Columbian sculpture shown in *AM* also played an important role in representing the complexity of Mesoamerica and the hypothetical relationships between these

cultures and Ancient Egypt. To begin with, it is worth pointing out that the mere presence of the casts bear witness that the Aztecs had developed monumental sculpture, a trait that, as explained in Chapter 2, has conventionally been considered a trait of cultural sophistication in Western thought. Furthermore, it seems that these reproductions were employed to demonstrate that Aztecs had achieved other advanced cultural achievements. For example, the 'Great Calendar Stone' was prime evidence of the development of Calendar systems in Pre-Columbian times. In addition, the guidebook proposed that this element showed further cultural correspondence between Egyptian and Aztec cultures. Indeed, the size of the 'Great Calendar Stone' was compared with that of the 'Zodiac of Dendera' (Bullock 1824b: 33), an enormous Egyptian monolith, whose cast had been brought to London for display purposes in 1824 (GMM 1824: 94: 795). To be true, by proposing these analogies, Bullock was following Humboldt's ideas regarding the similarities of Aztec and Egyptian cultures, which included parallelism of their respective chronological systems (Keen 1973: 335). However, by proposing cross-cultural analogies, *AM* generated a further innovative effect: it implicitly recognized that Mesoamerica had achieved considerable cultural developments as to be comparable with an already acknowledged 'ancient civilisation': the Egyptian.

The historical context of these representations cannot be overlooked. Indeed, the early 1800s witnessed a high peak in the long-standing history of Western 'Egyptomania' (Curl 1994). In fact, Bullock played a key role in this phenomena not only by constructing and decorating the Egyptian Hall following the inspiration of Denon's (1802) *Voyage dans la Basse et la Haute Égypte* (Elmes 1827:157, Survey of London XXIX: 266-270, King 1996: 117, Werner 2003), but also by presenting it in three spectacles that were extremely popular at the time. These were the display of Napoleon Bonaparte's Carriage (Bullock 1816a), the set up of a 'Museum Napoleon' (Altick 1978: 241), and the large and comprehensive exhibition on Egyptian artifacts, including a full-sized reproduction of the Tomb of Seti and his original alabaster sarcophagus, brought to London by Giovanni Battista Belzoni (Belzoni 1820, Pearce 2000: 109-125; Werner 2003). By stressing the similarities of Aztecs to Egyptians, *AM* can be considered a paradigmatic example of the influence of Egyptian archaeology in the interpretation of the archaeological knowledge of places as far away as Mexico. Furthermore, it is likely that this exhibition linked the early nineteenth-century processes of 'monumental reinvention' that were effectively taking place simultaneously, both in the history of Egyptology and American Archaeology (Pratt 1992: 134-135).

*AM* also played a significant part in the history of Mesoamerican archaeology, not only because it articulated a complex array of three-dimensional representations of the nature and characteristics of the Aztecs, but also because it formulated a series of innovative interpretations regarding the historical development of Pre-Columbian cultures within the particular intellectual milieu of nineteenth century archaeology.

Indeed, the early nineteenth century witnessed the development of various intellectual trends that contributed to the shaping of the history of archaeology both in Mexico and in England. The way in which these developments intersected with the representation of *AM*, and *vice-versa* are a matter of interest, since they showed significant relationships between academic phenomenology and display representational practices.

As Keen (1973: 55-71) has shown, since the ‘discovery’ of the American continent, European scholars have debated on the origins of its indigenous peoples and cultures, including the Aztecs. Different theories on this subject were discussed from the early 1600’s to the mid-1700’s; however, most of them concurred with Biblical theology, thus proposing a single genesis for all humans (Trigger 1989: 33). This *monogenist* approach implied that indigenous Americans were thought to have originated in the Old World, from where they spread in a series of dispersions and migrations (Trigger 1989: 33). From the late Eighteenth Century onwards, diffusionism continued to play a major role for explaining cultural development in history. However, due to the emergence of scientific formulations relating to the notion of progress in civilisation, diffusionary theories then began to shift from a pragmatic basis to a conceptual framework, which stressed the importance of the ‘process of intercommunication’ among cultures (Stocking 1987: 16).

Within this academic environment, Humboldt’s position regarding the origin of Mesoamerican cultures is, however, not clear. Whereas some investigators have sustained that he supported diffusionist theories, others have posed that his works took exactly the opposite position (Keen 1973: 344). To be true, the analysis on the Pyramids of Teotihuacán presented at the *Vues* was characterized by its ambivalence. On the one hand, Humboldt questioned whether the builders of these constructions had taken this type of construction from the Mongolian race, or from a common ancestor of the Chinese and Japanese (Humboldt 1984:126). On the other hand, by stressing the differences between the Egyptian and the Mexican pyramids –particularly in terms of their function–, he appeared to suggest that this architectural form could have developed independently in the New World (Humboldt 1984: 54, 124).

*AM* followed some Humboldtian precepts for representing and analyzing the Pyramids of Teotihuacán. However, it developed an innovative approach for explaining the origins of Mesoamerican cultures, whose conclusions were more categorical. As explained before, the guidebook compared the cultural achievements of the Aztecs with those of the ancient Egyptians, in order to propose that the former originated the latter, thus assuming a position clearly aligned with the diffusionist theory. By following this approach, *AM* not only embraced some of the principles of early nineteenth century British ethnology (embodied by the works of James Prichard), which through comparison, attempted to trace cultural derivation and origins (Stocking 1987: 51). Moreover, by making no explicit attempt to demonstrate that the links between Ancient Egyptians and Aztecs had been the result of diaspora, conquest or invasion,

AM reflected the 1800's broad sense of diffusion, which implied not only the migration of peoples, but also 'the dissemination of ideas' (Stocking 1987: 15).

The rationale of this interpretation can be found in the perception of historical timing that dominated early nineteenth century intellectual thinking. As with many contemporaries, Bullock's idea of the past was characterized by a lack of time-depth. Clavijero (1987: 49-51), one of the sources quoted in the display's guidebook calculated that 511 AD was the oldest date for Mexico, a year that marked the beginning of the migration of the Toltecs, who were held to be the builders of the Teotihuacán Pyramids. This meant that the construction of these monuments was put at least 500 years later than today's archaeological estimations, which are to 100-1 BC (Manzanilla 1995: 142: 151). A similar phenomenon affected the perception of Ancient Egyptian chronology at the time. Champollion's decipherment of Egyptian hieroglyphs in 1822 actually demonstrated the recent origin of the Zodiac of Dendera, 'thus putting an end to the disconcerting datings previously put forward –estimated between 15,000-6,000 BC)– that contradicted the chronologies based on the Bible and the Classical texts' (Donadoni *et.al.* 1990: 135-138). This signified that early nineteenth century Egyptian chronology, which allowed 1,663 years for Pharaonic history before the Persian conquest' of 525 BC, determined that the pyramids of Giza and Saqara (now dated 2,700-2,050 BC) had been constructed between 2,000 BC and 500 AD. Considering this 'tight' interpretation of historical time, it is hence perfectly reasonable that Bullock could have believed that some sort of contact could have occurred between Ancient Egypt and Ancient Mexico.

It is important to consider that *AM* diffusionist approach to Mesoamerica carried underlining messages, which constituted the political dimension of this display representation.

As shown above, *AM* promoted the view that the Aztecs had achieved a considerable degree of cultural sophistication by representing the complexity of their urban, architectural and sculptural manifestations, and associating them with a well-acknowledged ancient civilisation: the Egyptian. However, and rather ironically, it seems that Bullock found it difficult to accept that indigenous Americans had developed such cultural complexity by themselves. For example, referring to the Calendar Stone, the guidebook of *AM* manifested surprise at the Aztecs' chronological achievements, by stating that these were just 'a remarkable coincidence in a people who were ignorant of the existence of [...] other parts of the world' (Bullock 1824b: 28). Furthermore, by proposing that Aztec culture had originated in Egypt, *AM* implicitly proposed its cultural progress derived from external intervention, and thus, that Mesoamerican peoples lacked any capacity for independent development.

By doing so, Bullock was but showing that he was a man of his times. Indeed, similar instances have been detected in antiquarian research framed within colonial paradigms (Trigger 1984). For example, Colonial North America saw the emergence of the myth of the 'Mould-Builders': an

extinct race of inhabitants, unrelated to the Native Americans, that had erected the monumental constructions found in Ohio and the Mississippi valleys (Trigger 1989: 104-147). Furthermore, during the late nineteenth century, many archaeologists proposed that Great Zimbabwe was the product of foreign occupation (Garlake 1973: 15-16). However, two aspects distinguished *AM*. On the one hand, this display aimed to explain the past of a non-colonial stage. On the other hand, its representations did not imply that Aztecs were uncivilized; but rather, that they were incapable of promoting progress by their own means.

In fact, by representing ancient Egypt as the ‘creative originator’ of cultural development and ancient Mexico as the ‘static receiver’, *AM* actually placed these societies along a comparative axis of mirror-like categories –active/passive, superior/inferior–, which constitute key manifestations of the ‘Western systems of Alterity’: that is, the systematic store of images and discourses that individuals of Western culture have historically deployed in constructing images of ‘Otherness’ (Levin-Rojo 2001: 23).

The epistemological basis of Western alterity ‘assumes the essential superiority of the ‘Self’ [the Western World]; thus, functioning as a strategy of disempowerment of the ‘Other’ [the non-Western world]’ (Levin-Rojo 2001: 23). A clear manifestation of this political system can be found even in particular representations of casts at *AM*. For instance, the guidebook praised the great workmanship of the Great Calendar Stone, but made no valorization regarding its artistic qualities (Bullock 1824b: 12). The recognition of technical developments, rather than aesthetic merits, constituted a traditional opposition of the dialogical characterization of ‘Art vs. artifact’, a common discourse of nineteenth Century Western Systems of Alterity, particularly in relation to the perception of ethnographic collections (Williams 1985: 147).

However, *AM* did not build a dichotomy between Western civilisation and Non-Western savagery. Alternatively, it formulated various ideas that can be related to the network of practices at the core of *Orientalism*. As explained in Chapter 2, Said has proposed (1978: 43, 114-196) that during the last three centuries the works of Orientalists have assisted in the construction of stereotypical images of two ‘imaginary communities’ (Anderson 1983): the European that has been perceived as rational, developed, humane, superior, authentic, active, creative, and masculine; and the Oriental that has been seen as irrational, aberrant, backward, crude, despotic, barbaric, weak, feminine, sexually corrupt and exotic. This Orientalist characterization of the ‘Other’ certainly coincides with Bullock’s representation of the Aztecs in his 1824 display. As explained in section 4.2.2, *AM* proposed that the Aztecs were indeed crude, despotic and barbaric, particularly due to their bloody religion, which involved carrying out sacrificial practices. Such a general representation was further articulated at the display by employing the casts. For instance, the guidebook (Bullock 1824b: 41) stated that the ‘Serpent Goddess’ was ‘too disgusting and horrible for depiction’. Considering that this sculpture represented the sacred image of a ‘Goddess’, this interpretation signaled the aberrant character

of Aztec religion. Interestingly enough, *AM* associated the aesthetic qualifications of the sculptures with the violent and barbaric nature of Mesoamerican religion. Thus, the guidebook explained that after the deformity of the Teoyamique, ‘thousands of human victims were annually sacrificed’ (Bullock 1824b: 40).

It is noteworthy that, as in the case of Hinduism, within the discursive formulation of Indian *Orientalism* (Cfr. Singh 1996: 29), *AM* focused on Aztec religion transforming it into a paradigmatic axis of Otherness and opposition in relation to the Western (Christian) World. This was done by representing Mesoamerican religious practices as a mixture of bloody superstition, whose deities were not more than ‘living devils’ (Singh 1996: 22, 29; Cohn 1992: 79). Accordingly, the guidebook (1824b: 40) stated that the ‘Serpent Goddess’ served ‘to give the public an idea of the *monstrous deities* of [Aztec] peoples’ (my emphasis).

The integration of *Orientalism* into *AM* is evident by the fact that the guidebook (Bullock 1824b: 3) affirmed not only that Aztec Religion resembled that ‘of the Buddhist and Hindoo’, but also that there are comparisons to be made between their respective sacred places, architecture and sculpture:

The Temple and Cavern and Holly Mountain of the New World differ in little from the Dome of Jagghernaut, the Cave of Ellephanta or Ellora, and the High place of Oriental sacredness, while the enormous Serpent-God devouring human victims, and other [from India] carry resemblance even into minute details (Bullock 1824b: 41).

On the basis of these arguments, *AM* thus posed the hypothesis that Mesoamerican and Indian religion had had ‘a similar origin’ (Bullock 1824b:41). Such an argument was of interest because it implied the Orientalist discourse that Aztec idolatry was not considered a development of the Western past (i.e. the Egyptian culture), but rather a derivation of the ‘Other’ non-Christian, non-European reality. Therefore, the Orient was constructed as the source of the barbaric religious nature of the Aztecs, whereas the West constituted the source of the Mesoamerican progress. Therefore, *AM* confirmed traditional categories of Western Systems of Alterity, by affirming the superiority of Europeans and their past. The way in which the visitors of *AM* interpreted these and other representations articulated in the display will be analysed in the following section.

### 5.2.3. Interpretation

As explained in Chapter 4, press reviews constitute the main source of information regarding the public response to *AM*. Yet travel literature also offers interesting evidence of the manner in which visitors reacted to the representations articulated by this display.

Taking both types of data sources into account, it seems clear that the casts of monumental Aztec sculpture at *AM* exerted a powerful impact on the public: a number of references focused on these elements, expressing different opinions regarding their characteristics and their significance in the display. Their contents bear witness to the *AM* efficiency for transmitting representations, as well as to the capacity of viewers to respond to this process, by elaborating further interpretations about Mesoamerica.

A number of reports expressed opinions about the nature of the casts. For instance, the *Times* (TMN 1824: 4: 9) explained the Great Calendar Stone, the Stone Serpent, Teoyamique and other antiquities ‘were worthy of notice if the former correct and the latter genuine’. This statement contradicts the opinion posed by Fane (1993: 146) that Bullock’s audiences were not particularly discriminating about reproductions *versus* originals. In fact, the reporter not only separated these categories, but also employed different parameters for their evaluation: whereas, the antiquities were considered in relation to their authenticity, the casts were measured in terms of their accuracy. However, one should also take into consideration that the very questioning posed by these newspapers indicated the lack of criteria that nineteenth-century Britons had for assessing the correctness and genuineness of reproductions and antiquities, respectively. At the time, few Pre-Columbian objects were publicly displayed in the United Kingdom (see section 4.1). Besides, access to them was often restricted: for instance, during the early nineteenth century, visitors to the British Museum were admitted only from Monday to Friday from 9 am to 3 pm and tickets were provided exclusively by application and with the approval of the Principal Librarian (Caygill 1996: 11-12).

Considering these limitations, it is thus understandable that some visitors were convinced that the ‘Serpent Goddess’ was the reproduction of an original sculpture, as was the case with the rest of the monumental casts. Evidence of this proceeds from travel narratives. Particularly, G. Lyon’s *Residence in Mexico, 1826*, which described the author’s failed attempts to find and reproduce the original sculpture of the Serpent Goddess in Mexico City:

“There are the sculptures of the Goddess of the War and other minor idols, and the celebrated ‘Sacrificial Stone’ (never used for that purpose) presented by Mr. Bullock. The Calendar Stone [...] is placed on the wall of the Cathedral. I ... made excellent wax copies of the Goddess and the Sacrificial Stone. I would have also made [a copy] of the monstrous Serpent Goddess that I saw in Piccadilly, with the poor Indian victim [...] in his jaws. A large Serpent head was shown to me, but with the jaws closed, as part of a nobleman’s estate, but of the body none has heard of, and they laughed at me due to my questions [about it]’ (From Morales-Moreno 1998: 236, *my translation*).

Lyon’s statement proved that Bullock’s copies incited further reproduction processes, which in turn increased the popularity of the originals, the copies, and the technical casting process. In addition, it demonstrates that exhibitions were a considerable force of influence for travelling experiences during the nineteenth century.

Jordanova (1989: 43) has argued that 1800s displays played a key role in the discourse of travel exploration. Lyon's statement not only confirms this view, but also shows that the display's discourse shaped travelling experiences. Furthermore, by repeating some of the names and adjectives employed in the guidebook of *AM*, and attempting to reproduce the casts that had been exhibited in this display, his narrative showed the persuasive power of the display's representation for the articulation of further travelling and collecting practices.

Another recurrent topic of press reviews was the aesthetic value of Aztec sculpture, or more precisely, its lack of artistic merit. For instance, the *Classical Journal* (CJJ 1824: 29: 186) coincided with Bullock's (1824b: 30) negative appreciation of the Teoyamique, by stating that this was 'too much bizarre [...] to describe it'. A similar perspective can be found in the affirmation that 'the curiosity, not the beauty, the novelty, not the art, imminently entitled [the Mexican monuments] to learned attention' (CJJ 1824: 29: 176). This statement not only expressed the unequivocal meaning of the term 'curio' that was developed by nineteenth century Ethnography: indeed Beth Smith has expressed that this term served 'to express interest in [an object] without passing aesthetic judgement about it' (in Thomas 1991: 130). In addition, the qualification of Aztec monuments reproduced the axis of opposition between the categories of 'Art *vs.* artefact' (Williams 1985: 17).

The *Literary Gazette* (LIG 1824c: 237) further elaborated on the aspect of the casts and the nature of Mesoamerican religion. This was done by comparing *AM* with Mr. Days' exhibition of casts of Greek sculpture, a spectacle that was conveniently presented at adjoining premises in the Egyptian Hall. As a result of the evaluation, the reporter concluded that:

Mr. Day's [...] grand casts and fine pictures appeared more advanced than usual, from the contrast. The eye [...] dwelt upon them with increased admiration. The monsters of the Mexican idolatry were lost in the contemplation of Grecian art (LIG 1824c: 237).

This statement proves that early nineteenth-century Britons created mirror-like categorisations between European antiquities and their Mesoamerican counterparts. This not only promoted differences in terms of aesthetic valuation, but these categorisations also served to articulate a normative and political rhetoric of the process of Alterity, since they supported the superiority of Western cultures in relation to Non-Western cultures.

The press also responded to the diffusionist representations articulated in *AM*. Some reporters supported the idea that the pyramids of Teotihuacán and those of Giza were arranged in a similar urban layout (LMM 1824: 522-523). In addition, the *London Magazine* (1824: 522-523) and *New Monthly Magazine* (NMM 1824: 163-163) were convinced of both, the affinities and the common origin of Aztecs and Egyptians. The former source even mentioned that in *AM* 'there was a Zodiac of Dendera [displayed] under the title of the Great Calendar Stone'. However, none of these interpretations were as complex as those presented by the *Classical Journal* (CJJ



1824: 29: 189). To begin with, this review analysed the similarities between Aztec and Egyptian cultural productions proposed by *AM*, in order to evaluate whether or not Mesoamerican and Egyptian cultures shared a common origin. This analytical process was carried out not only by examining Bullock's arguments on the matter, but also by referring to the work of Champollion. The conclusions of this review were complex and innovative. The reporter contradicted the *AM* guidebook, stressing the differences between Ancient Egyptians and Aztecs, particularly in the degree of complexity achieved by each of them. In fact, he clearly stated that the 'Egyptians were a nation infinitely more enlightened than the Mexicans' (CJJ 1824: 29: 189). Thus, he refuted the possibility that the Aztecs derived directly from the Egyptians because of language and physiognomic differences, as well. Alternatively, and still following a diffusionist approach, this article proposed that Egyptians had colonised or conquered Mexico during the Pre-Columbian times. Therefore, it appears that public responses created further political axes of alterity in the representation of Aztecs, by conceiving of this culture as already dominated by Western cultures during Pre-Columbian times.

Interestingly enough, the reporter of the *Classical Journal* also developed further the Orientalist discourse posed by *AM*, for he confirmed the plausibility of the analogies between Mexican and Asiatic peoples, offering as additional evidence their shared genealogy and the migration depicted by the Codex Boturini (CJJ 1824: 29: 189). This interpretation shows that *AM* was not only powerful enough to persuade its audience, but also that it provided additional evidence and ample opportunities for further interpretation.

It is noteworthy that *AM* promoted certain outcomes for its interpretation. As Pearce suggests (1992: 205-206), simulations of the past require that 'disbelief should be suspended', an effect generated by complex engineering: 'artefacts that not only recreate, but are re-assembled [...] and voyeuristic viewers that take their place in the queue' (*my emphasis*). Bullock certainly followed these rules, by creating a spectacle in which Mexican antiquity was set up for examination by viewers. Indeed, the guidebook stimulated an active and intrusive act of observing at the display. Aglio's panoramic view also depicted visitors examining attentively the objects put on exhibition (Figure 11). This visual strategy had political undertones, which implied inequity between the observant culture and the observer culture, since the educational and entertainment purposes of the display justified the intrusion of a European *voyeur* in the most sacred place of the Aztec world.

*AM* was the first and the last time that a British nineteenth-century exhibit aimed to recreate the Pre-Columbian past. By the mid 1800s, another exhibition mode was developed on the other side of the Atlantic: this consisted of an approximation of the Pre-Columbian past by activating the passing of time through the articulation of the conceptual traits of the 'ruin'.

### 5.3. MAKING A ‘MAYA’ RUIN: *CRUGER ISLAND MONUMENT*, NEW YORK (1850-1870)

By the late 1830s, the American lawyer John Lloyd Stephens (1805-1852) had already established his name among the most famous travelling writers of North America (Fagan 1984:156). Favourable reviews matched the editorial success of his personal accounts of expeditions in Egypt, Greece, the Middle East and Eastern Europe (Stephens 1837, 1838). This background provided the expertise and financial means for a new venture that aimed to collect data about the geography, antiquity, characteristics and inhabitants of Southwest Mexico and Central America for the publication of a new travelogue. The most important innovation of this editorial initiative was the incorporation of visual records of the Pre-Columbian monuments, a task that was commissioned to the British architect, draftsman and panoramist F. Catherwood (1799-1854), who was at the time also living in New York City.

Stephen’s and Catherwood’s first expedition to Mesoamerica, which took place between 1840 and 1841, resulted in *Incidents of Travel in Central America, Yucatan and Chiapas* (1841). Soon after the release of this work in New York, they set out on a second campaign that largely focused on the exploration of Pre-Columbian sites in the Yucatan Peninsula. Written and graphic records produced during this venture comprised the *Incidents of Travel in Yucatan* (1842).

Many scholars have pointed out the significance of the *Incidents* to the development of nineteenth century travel literature (Gropp 1941: 21; Predmore 1949 in Ortega y Medina 1962a: 172). It is well documented that these works became huge editorial successes in the United States and the United Kingdom: in less than 10 years, 25 editions were published as part of 12 different reprints, nine of which appeared in the space of three months (Bernal 1980: 122). Furthermore, these *oeuvres* played a significant role in consolidating the travelogue genre on both sides of the Atlantic, particularly with audiences interested in archaeological subjects. In fact, the American poet Edgar Allan Poe (1809-1849) praised the *Incidents* as ‘the most interesting book of travel ever published’ (in Aguirre 2005: 66).

Bernal (1980: 121), Willey & Sabloff (1993) and O’Mara (1998: 221) have additionally acknowledged the academic importance of the *Incidents*, by stating that they represented a turning point in the history of Mexican, Latin American, and American archaeology, respectively. Taking a larger global view, Stocking (1987: 71) has also recognised that these *oeuvres* were crucial for the mid-nineteenth century burgeoning interest in ancient civilisations.

The success of the *Incidents* was largely due to the congenial writing style of Stephens (Keen 1984: 360). However, it is indisputable that the popular and academic acceptance of the work was also due to the images of Pre-Columbian sites produced by Catherwood, which –according to Manthorne (1989: 96)– can be considered ‘as masterpieces of their type created by an artist ideally suited to the task of recording’.

Catherwood's contribution to the history of archaeological representation of Mesoamerican cultures cannot be underestimated for many reasons. Historically speaking, his images were innovative due to both technical and artistic considerations. In effect, during the first 40 years of the nineteenth century, some books on Mesoamerica did present some illustrations of the surviving buildings and monuments located in various places of this territory (Cf. Keen 1973; Bernal 1980). Since images were often based on hand-drawn sketches, which were later transferred to engraving plates for final reproduction, the results rarely overcome the quality of an improved drawing. Catherwood was an architect trained at the Royal Academy of London under the influence of Joseph Turner (1775-1851) and John Soane (1753-1837) (Cf. Von Hagen 1973, Paxton 1986: 181). Turner was a powerful force in the definition of British landscape painting under the aegis of the Romantic artistic movement, whose aesthetic codes were surely adapted by Catherwood for his representations of Mesoamerican monuments. These illustrations indeed showed 'the virtue of Antiquity through the hypnotic power of its remains, by evoking reflections of transience and decline' (Cf. Lowenthal 1985: 182).

Through Soane, a man obsessed with Classical antiquity, Catherwood was introduced to Greek and Roman architecture, as well as to the archaeological depictions of Giovanni Battista Piranesi (1720-1778), a key contributor to the late eighteenth-century and early nineteenth-century development of Romanticism in Western plastic arts (Ficacci 2006: 22-29). Piranesi played a central role in the emergence and growing interest in the 'ruin' as an artistic topic in landscape painting: his treatment of Roman remains pursued the emerging taste of the 'sublime'. His engravings depicted monumental spaces, buildings and excavations and were characterised by meticulous details, original perspectives that emphasised their past glory, and aesthetic attention on their state of decay (Ficacci 2006: 30). A paradigmatic example of this was the *Vedutta dell'Arco di Tito* (Figure 26), which was published in Piranesi's climactic archaeological work: *Antichità Romana* (1740). Apart from incorporating the above mentioned aesthetic innovations

for the depiction of the Titus Arch as 'ruin', this representation also showed human figures, either as tourists or scholars thus expressing the need for recovering, researching and restoring such a glorious past, a key idea of Piranesi's philosophy regarding the role of architecture in the revolutionary modern age (Ficacci 2006: 7, 31).

Figure 26. *Vedutta dell'Arco di Tito* by Piranesi  
(From Ficacci 2006: 325)

As Paxton (1986: 18) has rightly

pointed out, Catherwood's views of Pre-Columbian monuments showed Piranesi's influence in the detailed depiction of ruins, in the general interest in combining didactic content with aesthetic concerns, and in placing human figures in the surroundings of the ruins to indicate scale and provide a sense of animation. However, Catherwood superseded Piranesi's efforts by depicting monuments from a wide range of archaeological cultures.

In effect, between 1824 and 1832, the British architect took part in the 'Grand Tour', making several trips to the Mediterranean, where he gained a sizeable reputation as a topographic artist (Von Hagen 1950: xiii). During this period, a powerful influence for Catherwood was Hubert Robert, a British artist nicknamed 'Robert de Ruins', whose accurate and detailed renderings of architectural features gained him respect amongst archaeologists who were at the time excavating Herculaneum. Robert often worked during archaeological explorations to create antiquarian records of recently discovered remains, thus developing a series of *in situ* survey techniques (Von Hagen 1950: xiii), which Catherwood might have learnt as part of his practice.

Therefore, by the time of his Mesoamerican endeavour, Catherwood counted with considerable training, knowledge, and experience in the representation of archaeological subjects. Furthermore, by perfecting the drawing technique through the use of a *camera-lucida*, he achieved meticulously detailed *in situ* studies of the Mesoamerican monuments (Bourbon 1999). These renderings were later enriched with the aesthetic language of the Romantic movement as well as with watercolour and engraving techniques, thus creating compositions that stood above those of their contemporaries (e.g. Humboldt 1810; Walker & Caddy 1839-1840 in Pendergast 1967; Friedrichsthal 1841; Norman 1843). Indeed, Catherwood's works have long been praised due to both their great artistic merit and their systematic concern for reliability (Manthorne 1989: 96).

Due to these merits and the editorial success of the *Incidents*, it is not strange that Stephens and Catherwood decided to widen the dissemination of their works in different media. As explained in Chapter 4, during the 1840s, they were planning to exhibit a collection of Mesoamerican antiquities along with a panorama of a Pre-Columbian site at *The Rotunda* in New York City, a project that never came into light due to an accidental fire (Oettermann 1997: 138). Regardless of its final destiny, this initiative was of considerable importance to the history of display representations. Historians have noticed that by the mid nineteenth century, popular entertainment flourished in the United States (Harris 1973: 4). Panoramas fitted the democratisation of cultural spectacles that was taking place in this country, since they blended amusement with self-instruction, serving as a surrogate of the travelling experience and providing knowledge about foreign cities and exotic locales (Wilcox 1988: 38-40, 166). However, studies about *Panoramia* have often overlooked the role of these spectacles on the dissemination of archaeological knowledge through the depiction of monuments and other images of various ancient cultures, including the Egyptian, the Assyrian, etc. (Cf. Wilcox 1988: 38-127). Catherwood's panorama was the first ever in history that aimed to represent Pre-

Columbian monuments worldwide. Regardless of the destiny of this initiative, none can deny the potential of Catherwood's representations for incorporation into panoramic modes of vision. In fact, the famous nineteenth-century Panoramist H. Sattler managed to exhibit in both Europe and America a *View of Orizaba*, which was an enlarged reproduction of Catherwood's representation of the archaeological site of Tulum, Mexico (Cf. Wilcox 1988: 126-129).

By 1844, Catherwood published a series of artistically conceived colour lithographs as part of a folio album entitled *Views of Ancient Monuments in Central America, Chiapas, and Yucatan* (Catherwood 1844). According to Manthorne (1989: 96), the British architect considered these images as 'art works' that could stand on their own. Appropriately, from 1843 to 1848, original drawings and lithographic copies of the *Views* were put on display through a series of formal gallery exhibits both in London and in New York. These exhibitions took place in various prestigious academic institutions, including the Royal Institute of British Architects (RIBA), the New York Historical Society (NYHS), the National Academy of Design (NAD) and the American Art Union (AAU) (Manthorne 1989: 96; RNAD 1844-1845: 60). Information about the production, representation and interpretation of these exhibits is very scarce. However, the diversity of institutions involved in the exhibitions indicates that the display representation of Mesoamerican ruins experienced a vogue within different professional circles during the mid nineteenth century on both sides of the Atlantic.

Literature regarding Stephens and Catherwood has, however, overseen what would be the most enduring exhibition derived from the *Incidents*. This was the construction and display of a built-ruin in Cruger Island, a peninsula located on the shores of the Hudson River, New York State. Documentation about this exhibition has never been analysed or published before. It is not the aim of this section to make an exhaustive analysis of the extensive and rich textual, visual and display production of Stephens and Catherwood. However, it is worthy considering that the representation of a single architectural form –the arch– appears to connect the *Incidents*, the *Views*, the gallery exhibitions, and the Cruger Island Monument. Taking this subject as a matter of examination, the following sections will examine the production, representation, and interpretation of the Cruger Island Monument in relation to other interpretations and representations of Mesoamerican 'arches' produced by Stephens and Catherwood. The aim is to understand how two- and three-dimensional manifestations of monuments presented in displays contributed to new interpretations of Pre-Columbian archaeology during the mid-1800 in the U.S.

### 5.3.1 Production

Cruger Island was (and still is) a peninsula located on the west bank of the Hudson River in New York State, between today's Tarryton and Newsburg. Native American peoples, who

had originally occupied it, presumably sold them to English immigrants during the seventeenth century (Santora 1971: 12-13), a period characterised by the progressive removal of indigenous peoples from the territories occupied by the British Colonies (Bieder 1986: 34).

As much of the territory that surrounded it, Cruger Island maintained a rural development during most of Colonial times; however, this state of affairs dramatically changed in the years following the end of the American Revolution (Crammer 1939: 184). Attracted by the beauty of its natural scenery, from late eighteenth century onwards, merchants and industrialists of increasing political, economic and social power in New York City began to build seasonal and permanent residences on the shores of the Hudson River, thus developing a network of family, friendship, business, and cultural relationships of great influence in the United States (Crammer 1939: 186). With the success of the Hudson River School, an artistic movement centred on the depiction of landscape painting towards the mid-1800s, the reputation of the Hudson Area achieved its peak.

John Cruger (1807-1879), an attorney, soldier, and descendant of a powerful political family participated in this historical process, upon acquiring Magdalen Island, renaming it Cruger Island, and settling there (NCB 2009). We do not know when, where and how Stephens met Cruger. However, it appears that they were linked by business. In the 1840s, Stephens became an investor of the New York Rail Company (Santora 1971:3). According to one legend, Cruger gave this firm the right of way to his land in return for the promise that its trains would stop for him whenever he deemed necessary (Santora 1971:3).

By this time, Cruger and Stephens had already developed a close personal relationship: a clear proof of this is that the latter gave a series of Pre-Columbian sculptures and bas-reliefs to the former. Literature on the history of Mesoamerican archaeology has overlooked the immediate



Figure 27. Cruger Island Monument *circa* 1920s  
(Courtesy AMNH Archives)

destiny of these antiquities: at some point between 1840 and 1850, Cruger Island saw the construction of an arch imitating a broken and decayed ruin, which was partly new, and partly conformed by the original antiquities mentioned above (AMNH 1909; Kelemen 1941: 107) (Figures 27 and 28).

According to the *Incidents*, the basreliefs were the original sculpted doorjambs of a building located in the archaeological site of Kabah, Yucatan (Stephens 1996: 113). The travelogue described how Stephens acquired these antiquities *in situ*, by separating them from the actual architectonic fabric (Stephens 1996: 113). It also explained the sculptures' designs: they showed two figures, one standing in a rather triumphant attitude and other kneeling before him with a weapon in his hands, a composition that he interpreted as evidence of military conflicts among indigenous peoples (Stephens 1996: 133). Due to the relevance of these antiquities, Catherwood produced a drawing of them (Figure 29).

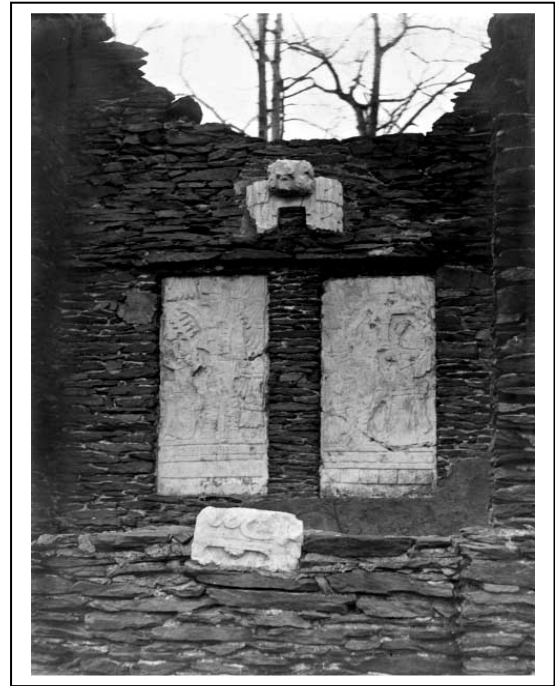


Figure 28. Mayan sculptures in *CIM*  
(Courtesy AMNH Archives)

Stephens' collecting activities in Mesoamerica can be considered a paradigmatic example of Hinsley (1993: 10) 'consular archaeology' because the American explorer had been appointed U.S. Minister for the Central American Republic and counted with the aid of the U.S. Envoy in Campeche, who actually helped him acquire casts of the principal monuments of a Palenque archaeological site (Stephens 1969: I; v-vi, 316. 364.392). However, it is noteworthy that once in New York in 1840, Stephens acquired private funds for transporting the antiquities from Guatemala to the Unites States (Stephens 1996: I: 469). Furthermore, before his second expedition to Yucatan, he rejected his diplomatic assignment. Therefore, Stephens' collecting of American antiquities acted on the basis of a complex net of political and private agencies. Furthermore, his expeditions showed the active input of a philosophy of individualism, which characterised American Romanticism by shaping the idea of a 'self as a hero of its own existence, set against the backdrop of a God-given, uniquely American frontier' (Heath & Boreman 1999: 164). Little is known about the circumstances that motivated

Figure 29. Stone doorjambs removed  
from Kabah by Stephens  
(From Stephens 1996: 133)

the building of Cruger Island Monument (hereafter *CIM*). Yet, historically speaking, its erection was but part of a longstanding tradition of building mock-ruins as landscape ornamentation in Western culture, a phenomenon that reached its climax during the eighteenth century in Europe due to the growth of antiquarianism, the rise of romantic ideas about the ‘ruin’, the vogue of picturesque painting, and particular developments in garden design (Watkin 1999: 1-5). Mock ruins were then considered useful for producing agreeable effects of aesthetic pleasure, as well as to provoke instructive contemplation (Smiles 1994: 194). 1700s British devotees to landscape gardening were particularly inspired by educational purposes during the construction of several built ruins in many gardens and parks in London (Smiles 1994: 194-198) (Figure 30). Many of these structures evoke Greek, Roman and Gothic monuments; however, from the late 1700s onwards, Hindu, Chinese, and Prehistoric fake ruins began to appear (Smiles 1994: 195). At the beginnings of the 1800s, their design reflected some eclectic combinations of architectural styles (Watkin 1999: 1-5).

As part of this historical process, Britain saw the publication of several manuals, whose aim was to aid in the designing of mock ruins. Among these, W. Shenstone’s *Unnconnected Thoughts of Gardening* (1764) and T. Whately’s *Observations of Modern Gardening* (1770) forged a philosophical basis for the meaning of the artificial ruins in landscape gardening and their didactic purposes for moral improvement. Indeed, as the decline of civilisation was invariably attributed to moral corruption, ruins were then perceived as metaphors of inner decay, as well as symbolic warnings against sin and depravity (Woodward 1999: 15).

It is very likely that Stephens, Catherwood and Cruger were aware of the tradition of fake ruins in Britain, since this country and Europe were the dominant force of inspiration and taste for mid nineteenth century American educated classes. However, this does not mean that *CIM* was a simple reproduction of European fake ruins. As far as we know, this was the first-ever built ruin inspired by Pre-Columbian architecture, worldwide.

Figure 30. Mocked ruin built in Kew Gardens, London *circa* 1800s  
(From Woodward 1999: 15)



Information about the actual building process of *CIM* is scarce. Indirect evidence suggests that Catherwood participated in its design and erection. Apart from counting with plenty of authority in Pre-Columbian architecture, he was involved in at least two projects of garden ornamentation for New York City during the 1840s (Von Hagen 1950: 100-101). In addition, as explained before, a powerful influential force in Catherwood's architectural training was Sloane, a substantial contributor to early nineteenth-century British 'Ruinmania' and himself a builder of fake ruins in London (Watkin 1999: 113).

Figure 31. Ruined Arch, Kabah, photographed by Thompson *circa* 1890  
(From Ackermann 1996: 126)

It appears that for the designing of the monument, Catherwood was inspired by an actual Pre-Columbian monument, which was located at Kabah, the same archaeological site where Stephens had acquired the sculptured doorjambs that later were incorporated into *CIM*. This was a structure located at on side of the Camino Real, which according to Stephens (1996: 127) was 'all in ruinous condition' (Figure 31). Interestingly enough, he stated the importance of this monument, by stating that this was a:

Monument perhaps more curious and interesting than any that has been presented. It is a lonely arch, of the same form with all the rest, having a span of fourteen feet. It stands on a ruined mound, disconnected from other conditions' (Stephens 1996: 127)

The construction of *CIM* indeed followed the characteristics of this structure: it was erected as a lonely, disconnected structure in a ruinous condition. Its location at the top of Cruger Island resembled the ruined mound in which the original arch of Kabah was situated. Furthermore, it was placed at a prominent place of the peninsula, at the shores of the Hudson River, which served as the main route of transit to New York City. This equated the location of the Kabah Arch at one side of the Camino Real. The position *CIM* was also strategic since it ensured its appreciation from land and from the river, and therefore, it was a landscape feature designed for exhibition and observation.

It is worth considering that *CIM* was built in the midst of a key transformation in the history of America. Historians have described the decades of the 1840s and the 1850s in the United States as the 'Young America': an ambiguous term that is associated with the search of cultural identity' (Schuley 1996: 3). This process had multiple manifestations both in art and architecture.

Romanticism exerted a great influence on development of the arts at these times: 'Americans felt a sense of sacredness regarding 'the enormity and sublimity of the landscape that God had

provided to them' (Heath & Boreman 1999:165). This clamour grew intensively between 1825 and 1870 with the formation of the Hudson River School, an artistic movement devoted to the depiction of the American countryside, which created dramatic and unique landscape paintings of the Hudson River area within the conventions of Romantic realism (Rodriguez 1988: 24). The founder and leader of this movement, Thomas Cole, not only exhibited his works at the same galleries that Catherwood did in New York, but one of his works entitled *The Moonlight* (1834), depicted a false ruin, which following Crammer (1939) might have served as inspiration for the building of *CIM*.

Nobody has hitherto noticed that the construction of *CIM* also revolved around the career of A. Downing, an architect, landscape gardener, horticulturalist, and resident of the Hudson River area, who is recognised as 'America's first aesthetic missionary' (Benson 1931: 3 in Schuley 1996: 35). Indeed, the *oeuvre* that catapulted his career – *The Treatise on the Theory and Practice of Landscape Gardening Adapted to North America*, was published in 1841, only a couple of years before the erection of *CIM*. Furthermore, the huge impact of Downing's *Treatise* in middle-class and aristocratic taste in the United States appears to have been related to the *CIM*, due to three reasons:

- First, Downing's *Treatise* called for the development of American architectural taste from the near universality of 'Classical' revivals in Gothic, Italianate, and other picturesque styles for domestic design (Schuley 1996: 1). Therefore, his revolution in architectural design coupled with an interest in revitalising the characteristics of past monuments, forming an intellectual programme that was also at the core of erecting *CIA* as a reconstruction of a Pre-Columbian feature.
- Second, Downing's philosophy was not only aesthetic, but also educational, since it proposed that domestic architecture could affect the morals of the owners (Scully 1970: 175). In fact, Downing saw the progression of American architecture as a nationalistic mission: America's evolution from pioneer condition to a more advanced state of civilisation (Scully 1970: 175). These ideas shaped the architectural style that has been associated with the middle nineteenth-century cottages and villages of the United States (Scully 1970: 170). Many residences of the Hudson River area were designed under the influence of Downing's philosophy (Schuley 1996: 1). Therefore, the *Treatise* proposed premises that were compatible, if not similar, to the rationale followed by the construction of mock ruins. Moreover, the construction of *CIA* might have intended to contribute to a nationalistic agenda for both aesthetic and moral improvement.
- Third, interestingly enough, Downing's *Treatise* recommended constructing embellishments on the surroundings of domestic and public constructions. Perhaps also due to his influence, from the 1840s onwards, many properties on the shore of the

Hudson River incorporated ruins, which gave to the landscape ‘an antique look comparable to the Rhine’ (Crammer 1939: 215). The CIA was part of this scenery. However, its style differentiated it from the rest, because instead of evoking a European past, it referred to an American ancient culture, thus echoing the patriotic ideology at the core of Downing’s philosophy.

The implications of such representation and its significance will be explored in the following section in relation to Stephens’ and Catherwood’s textual and visual interpretations of Mesoamerican monuments.

### 5.3.2. Representation

According to Fagan (1984: 154) and Baudez & Picasso (1987: 154), Catherwood might have introduced Stephens to the antiquarian interest in Mesoamerica through Antonio del Rio’s *Description of the Ruins of an Ancient City Discovered near Palenque* (1822), a work published in London that not only encouraged further visitors to collect antiquities, but also was posed upon the hypothesis that the origins of Mesoamerican monuments were among Western ancient civilisations, including the Egyptians, the Romans, and several other Oriental cultures.

Stephens and Catherwood’s expeditions to Mesoamerica were not only inspired by this scholarly enquiry, but approached it through detailed planning. Accordingly, before setting on their first expedition to Central America, the parties signed a contract, which stated that the British architect would:

[...] exercise his skills as an artist, and make drawings of the ruins of Palenque, Uxmal, Copan, and other ruined cities, places, scenes and, monuments as may be considered desirable by the said Stephens (J. Stephens papers, Bancroft Library, in Bourbon 1999).

This simple administrative document demonstrates that from the very beginning of their Mexican and Central American venture, Stephens and Catherwood were interested in producing visual representations of the Pre-Columbian monuments. Furthermore, its contents bear witness that before actually seeing these cultural manifestations, the travellers already counted on a number of pre-conceptions about them. Both the American and the British travellers considered that Mesoamerican ruins had once conformed urban configurations ornamented with standing structures, a recognition that meant that the builders were thought of as having achieved a considerable cultural sophistication. This contradicts the idea that ‘*after* mid-century Pre-Columbian artefacts increasingly drew cultural valuation of status as “art” from the association as the products of high, lost civilisations of possibly urban dimensions’ (Hinsley 1993: 113, *my emphasis*). Thus it was due to the *Incidents* that by the 1840s the designation of a

lost, ruined city had already improved the meaning of the architectural remains of the Pre-Columbian world among some Americans and Britons.

The *Incidents* showed ample evidence of Stephens' and Catherwood's attempts to produce recordings, obtain information, and collect material evidence on the nature of Mesoamerican cities. Producing visual representations of the Pre-Columbian urban populations was not an easy task for Catherwood, due to their size, state of decay, and the coverage of the jungle. For these reasons, the *Incidents* published but a limited number of general views and sketch plans of the central parts of some Pre-Columbian settlements (i.e. Stephens 1969: I: between 366-337). Alternatively, the travelogues' narrative continuously referred to the extensiveness and the density of the Pre-Columbian sites that the expedition found in the course of its journeys (Stephens 1969: II: 335, 338). Interest in Mesoamerican cities was made evident by the fact that the final chapter of the *Incidents of Travel in Chiapas, Yucatan and Central America* is entirely devoted to analyse these manifestations in order to answer the key archaeological question that motivated the expeditions: the identity of Pre-Columbian builders. Stephen's conclusion in this regard was categorical and summarized his main contribution to archaeology: although the origin of Mesoamerican cities and monuments was unknown, they differed from the urban developments of any other people. In Stephens' (1969: II: 442) words, Mesoamerican cities and monuments stood alone, 'having a distinct, separate, independent existence; like plants and fruits of the soil, *indigenous*'.

Indeed, as many scholars (Bernal 1980: 121; Willey & Sabloff 1993: 17; O'Mara 1998: 221) have pointed out, Stephens was the first to recognise that Pre-Columbian sites had been built by indigenous peoples, a truly ground-breaking hypothesis since most of his predecessors and contemporaries, following diffusionist theories, had proposed that the builders of these cities had been of foreign origin (e.g. Kingsborough 1830-1838; Baradere 1834; Galindo 1834; Waldeck [1838] 1996). In order to substantiate this claim, Stephens tried to collect material evidence: Chapter 4 has already described his attempts to buy whole Pre-Columbian sites, which culminated with the purchase of Copan for fifty dollars (Stephens 1969: II: 122-128, 361-362), grand-scale collecting initiatives were motivated by exhibiting purposes: mainly, the establishment of a great museum in the U.S. However, it is worth considering that Von Hagen (1950), Ortega y Medina (1953, 1962a, 1962b) and Hinsley (1993: 111) have uncovered the political motivations of these endeavours, by stating that *Incidents* set the foundations for an 'Archaeological Monroism', i.e. an early manifestation of American hemispherical (imperialistic) expansion through the appropriation of Pre-Columbian archaeology, which was based on the Manifest Destiny and the Monroe Doctrine. Furthermore, these scholars have explained that this process involved the conceptual conversion of the Maya past into an American 'Classical Antiquity', comparable to Europe's Greco-Roman past. However, none hitherto systematically

analysed the way in which this re-conceptualization was attained through four of verbal strategies, as follows:

First, the *Incidents* portrayed the Pre-Columbian artist-craftsman as an anonymous religious worker with individual expression, whose capabilities were equated to Greek sculptors (Cf. Hinsley 1993: 113).

Second, Stephens proposed a revaluation of the artistic value of the PreColumbian remains, which the *Incidents* narrated as a revelation:

The sight of unexpected monuments [in Copan} put in rest at once and forever, in our minds all uncertainty in regard to the character of American Antiquities, and gave us the assurance that [they ...] were *works of art*; [their] workmanship was equal to the finest monuments of the Egyptians (Stephens 1969: 1: 103, *my emphasis*)

Third, by describing Pre-Columbian ‘sculptures approaching Greek models,’ Stephens articulated a rhetorical opinion that, following Ortega y Medina (1953: 12) elevated the status of Mesoamerican monuments to the rank of any artistic production of the ancient civilisations of the world. In fact, by comparing Mesoamerica to Egyptian civilisation he also expressed this idea.

Four, the *Incidents* incorporated Pre-Columbian monuments into the conceptual framework of the ‘ruin’: a notion that, as explained before, entailed a series of associated ideas in Western thought. These ideas contemplated, apart from imaginings of a mysterious, wrecked, decaying, ancient, glorious and desolated structure, a range of emotional, didactic and moral issues, including melancholy, the metaphor of decay, the morbid enjoyment of destruction, warnings against depravity and corruption (Cf. Macaulay 1953: 11, Lowenthal 1985: 137; Woodward 1999: 15). Interestingly enough, a mixture of these associations appeared in Stephens’ analysis on the ruins of Copan:

Of the moral effect of the monuments themselves, standing as they do in the depths of the tropical forest, silent and solemn, strange in design, excellent in sculpture, rich in ornaments, different from the works of any other people, their uses and purposes, their whole history so entirely unknown, with hieroglyphics explaining all, but perfectly unintelligible, I shall not pretend to convey an idea. Often the imagination was pained in gazing them. The tone that pervades the ruins is that of solemnity (Stephens 1969:1: 53)

Stephens’ words showed that ruins indeed provide an incentive for restoring history, and more importantly, to question its origins (Cf. Jackson 1980: 100). Furthermore, the *Incidents’* narrative formulated a theory about the cyclical development of history by proposing that the builders of Mesoamerican monuments ‘had passed through all the stages to the rise and fall of nations; reached their golden age, and perished, entirely unknown. The links that connected them with

the human family were severed and lost and these were the only memorials' (Stephens 1969: II: 356).

Indeed, Stephens' interpretation of ruins evoked the past, inspiring reflection about the passing of time, particularly, about temporal change towards decay (Cf. Lowenthal 1985: 137):

Nor shall at this moment offer any conjecture in regard to the people who built it, or the time when or the means by which it was depopulated, and became a desolation and ruin; whether it fell by the sword or famine, or pestilence. The trees which shroud it may have sprung from the blood of its slaughtered inhabitants; they may have perished howling with hunger; or pestilence [...] may have piled its streets with dead, and driven forever the feeble remnants from their home (Stephens 1969: II: 159).

Through this evocation, the American explorer showed that wrecked buildings 'made manifest the melancholy lesson that all men's moulder to insignificance': in effect, the dominant associations with decay is our own transience and the realisation of our mortality (Lowenthal 1985: 137; Macaulay 1953: xvi).

Macaulay (1953: 11) has argued that the pleasure of ruins is the host of two minor delights. On the one hand, there is the enjoyment of looting and carrying away fragments, an activity that, as explained before, was skilfully performed by the American explorer. On the other hand, there is the joy of being portrayed against decayed constructions, a pleasure that Stephens achieved through the representations made by Catherwood.

Indeed, the *Incidents* and the *Views* depicted complex representations of Mesoamerican monuments, which included their landscape, the activities of the explorers, and the role played by indigenous assistants incorporated into their expeditions. The way in which human agents were depicted and their meanings will be analysed in Chapter 6. However, Catherwood's representations of Mesoamerican monuments deserve our attention, since these depictions also played a role in incorporating Pre-Columbian monuments into the visual language of 'ruins' that Western Romantic movements have developed since the eighteenth century.

Wrecked, old and ancient constructions have long been integral elements of the picturesque view (Macaulay 1953: xvi). However, during the mid-eighteenth century the philosophy of romanticism added a 'sense of time and nature devouring the relics of antiquity' to these types of representations (Lowenthal 1985: 174;), an effect that Catherwood evoked by depicting Pre-Columbian monuments as decay constructions standing within an almost suffocating jungle surrounding.

At the beginning of the nineteenth century, English Landscape Painting consolidated into a serious academic genre, which often involved the depiction of ruins (Piggott 1978: 101, Payne 1987:41). Turner elevated British landscape painting to an eminence rivalling history painting, by experimenting with the effect of light, which resulted in depicting sublime dramas of nature and

man-made figures that served to reflect upon human experience (Piggott 1978: 99-100). This mode of expression surely influenced Catherwood's artistic style (Payne 1987:11): indeed, as Manthorne (1989: 98) suggests, the dramatic and mysterious appeal of some images published of the *Views*—developed through a manipulation of scale, light and perspective—may have been inspired by Turner's works.

Images of decay and provocative ruined grandeur appealed to a great number of eighteenth- and nineteenth- century Romantic painters. Lord Kames' *Elements of Criticism* (1762:3:313 in Lowenthal 1985: 174) formulated a body of theory that explained such attraction, which addressed both the sensorial and the emotional associations relating to particular architectural styles, including Gothic, Greek and Roman ruins. These precepts were reflected by Piranesi's depictions of Roman monuments, which truly showed the aura of titanic power of this ancient empire, a vision that served to re-evaluate the art of Rome with respect to that of Greece (Manthorne 1986:91).

Similarly, as much as Stephens's narratives, Catherwood's representations played an active role in the aesthetic re-evaluation of the art and architecture of Pre-Hispanic America in relation to the antiquity of the Old World. According to Manthorne (1989: 91-97) Catherwood's depictions employed three visual strategies to highlight the advanced technology and utter originality of Mesoamerican monuments.

- Firstly, there was the selection of frontal views of buildings, their orientation parallel to the picture, and a deliberate vantage point of perspective, all of which served to enhance the monumentality of the Pre-Hispanic monuments.
- Secondly, such an orientation allowed a detailed depiction of the ornamentation free of distortions to which the viewer's attention and appreciation could be directed.
- Thirdly, Catherwood's representations often emphasised unique architectural and engineering developments, such as corbelled arches.

A paradigmatic example of the use of these visual strategies is the watercolour engraving of the *Arch of Labná* (Figure 31, which was modified for the *Views* with an oblique perspective, incorporating the image of Stephens and his indigenous auxiliaries. Interestingly enough, Catherwood (1993: 82-83) emphasised the importance of the architectural element by explaining in his accompanying essay that Labna was famous due to its arch.

There is a significant point to underline here: Catherwood's paintings were not just influenced by the works of precedent European Romantic artists devoted to the representation of ruins; his images also incorporated Pre-Columbian monuments within pre-existing artistic modes and codes of representation associated with the glorious remains of the Old World. As

Figure 31. *Arch of Labná* by Catherwood (1993: 83)

a result, the American ancient past was integrated into the nineteenth-century pictorial language of antiquity. There was a paradox in this process, though: Catherwood tried to actively contribute to the idea of singular and independent indigenous American Antiquity, but his representations framed the Mesoamerican past within European conventions for representing ancient cultures. However, we need to take into account that the dominant feature of the nationalist discourse of American antiquity in the 1840s was that the United States was emerging and developing with a dialogue with Europe and its past. This relationship was evident in Stephen's plea to Europeans to leave Pre-Columbian monuments to Americans and also in his narrative about the 'Isolated Arch' of Kabah, which stated:

Darkness rests upon its history, but in that the desolation and solicitude, among the ruins around, it stood as the proud memorial of a Roman triumph. Perhaps, like the Arch of Titus that was erected to commemorate the victories over enemies (Stephens 1996: 127).

Woodward (1999: 15) has explained that ruins also served as symbols of triumph over enemies, a metaphor that surely served to equate Labná's Isolated Arch with the Titus Arch. The representation of *CIM* not only served to emphasise the incorporation of Mesoamerican monuments into the three-dimensional language of the 'ruin' as an element for garden design, but the mock-ruin also addressed themes of military triumph. As explained before, Stephens thought that the original bas-reliefs represented a war-related scene. The location of the monument might have also had signified this, since according to Santora (1971: 12), from the 1700's onwards a traditional legend told of an aboriginal battle that had taken place on Cruger Island, ending in the victory of the Tuscaroa tribe. Therefore, since the mid nineteenth century, *CIM* served to substitute America's own particular aboriginal past, with a 'Panamerican' antiquity, whose characteristics were represented as 'civilised', and therefore, as the suitable predecessor of the new U.S. civilisation (*contra* Barnett-Sanchez 1993: 178-179).



In this conceptual formulation, the selection of the arch as the architectural feature to be represented by *CIM* can be hardly seen as arbitrary. Several passages of *Incidents* pointed to the particular arch system that Pre-Columbian builders have used for their constructions (e.g Stephens 1969: 247-248). The *Incidents in Yucatan* actually devoted a whole chapter to examining the particular formal characteristics of the Mesoamerican arch and its form of construction, as well as comparing it to Indian, Roman, Greek, Egyptian and Etruscan arches (Stephens 1969: 273-278). Drawings of these arches included in the appendix were telling indicators of Catherwood's experience in the architectural features of different cultures of antiquity in both, the Old World and the New World. Interestingly enough, Stephens (1996: 277) found similarities between Egyptian and American arches; nonetheless the American explorer supported his theory of an aboriginal, independent development for Mesoamerican antiquity, by arguing that 'no inference as to common origin or international communication can be safely drawn from such coincidences'.

Considering above analysis of *AM*, this section shows how in a matter of less than 30 years, Mesoamerican monuments experienced a complete change in their display representations. The way in which some Americans interpreted Catherwood's and Stephens' representations of Mesoamerican cultures, including *CIM*, will be the subject of analysis in the following section.

### 5.3.2. Interpretation

In contrast to *AM*, responses to the exhibits associated with the *Incidents* proceed mainly from individual contributions, rather than from press reviews. The sources of information were also entirely different, since the responses to Catherwood's and Stephens' display representations came from academic and aristocratic circles.

A first range of opinions corresponded to a report of the New York Historical Society (here and after NYHS), which was devoted to discuss the 1843 Catherwood exhibit of watercolour engravings on its own premises. The opinions of this meeting expressed in many ways admiration for Catherwood's representations. To be true, *Incidents* (1969:22) had already referred to the ample experience of the British architect in studying antiquities of the Old World, and especially, to his familiarity of those 'remains of ancient architectural greatness'. The President of the NYHS, Albert Gallatin, not only coincided with this view, but actually honoured Catherwood by stating that 'only an artist that had studied the antiquities of the Old World could have been able to point out to analogies and dissimilarities, [bringing Pre-Hispanic cities] to the light of the civilised world' (*Proceedings of the NYHS* 10-13 in Von Hagen 1950: 174). Therefore, at least some members of the audience of the display could perceive the power of the images as interlocutors between Old World and New World Antiquity. It is worthy of

consideration that the authority of their opinions was vouched for by the scholarly reputation of the NYHS, but also by Gallatin's reputation, for he was a recognised scholar, particularly interested in the Antiquity of America, due to the publication of his *Notes on Semi-civilized Nations of Mexico, Yucatan and Central America* (1845).

As explained before, Catherwood recognised the artistic value of his own works. However, some of the members of the NYHS could also recognise the importance of these visual representations for academic development. For instance, it was affirmed that the depictions constituted a 'great progress for Ethnological knowledge' (*Proceedings of the NYHS* 10-13 in Von Hagen 1956: 174). Gallatin further praised the truth, authenticity and scrupulous fidelity of Catherwood's drawings, adding that they contributed 'greatly to the scanty knowledge that before [we] possessed of these regions [...] throw[ing] light upon important questions to be resolved in relation to the origin of the race whom they inhabited' (*Proceedings of the NYHS* 10-13 in Von Hagen 1956: 174). This statement clearly showed the power of ruins for provoking questions about the past and evoking a return to human origins (Cf. Lowenthal 1985: 137).

Some opinions expressed at the NYHS meeting clearly demonstrated that Catherwood's representations efficiently articulated Stephens' ideas regarding the Pre-Columbian monuments. For example, Gallatin stated that the watercolour engravings presented at the display showed a type of architecture which was entirely different from elsewhere, an 'aspect to the American Continent, [which] afforded highly interesting and important subjects for historical science' (*Proceedings of the NYHS* 10-13 in Von Hagen 1956: 174).

Catherwood's exhibit was indeed a success for the NYHS, calling for the publication of the drawings and their distribution in colleges, libraries and societies of the United States, since they 'promot[ed] interest on science' (*Proceedings of the NYHS* 10-13 in Von Hagen 1956: 174). Furthermore, it was made evident that this interest was not only for academic purposes, but also for a nationalistic agenda. In effect, Gallatin expressed that Catherwood's works were 'objects of national pride: [...] their accurate scientific details of architecture and *art* [were] worthy object of American enterprise' (*Proceedings of the NYHS* 10-13 in Von Hagen 1956: 175, *my emphasis*). Furthermore, by employing the category of *art* to describe architectural ornamentation, Gallatin recognised the advanced cultural complexity of Mesoamerican cultures, which was central to their re-conceptualisation as American Classical Antiquity.

The artistic influence of the Romantic Movement on Catherwood's representations of Mesoamerica was not acknowledged in this academic circle. However, such an issue was central for the interpretation of *CIM*. In *The Homes of the New World*, Bremmer (1853: 1: 19) described the great variety of buildings erected in the Hudson River Highland, pointing to the predominance of Gothic and Grecian style constructions on the beautiful natural scenery. Furthermore, she also provided glimpses of the social environment of Downings' house and the

Hudson River area, by describing a group of residents –editors, businessmen and aristocrats–, who were characterised by their patriotism and faith in the future of the U.S. (Bremmer 1853: I: 40-44).

Interestingly enough, Bremmer narrated a visit to *CIM*, which indicates that this monument held an important place in local tourism practices of the Hudson elite: the community that was at the time consuming Hudson River School paintings, promoting Downing's architecture, and thus promoting a new form of cultural nationalism. Bremmer's narrative about the *CIM* scene was indicative of the feelings and emotions associated with Romantic philosophy and the notion of 'ruin':

One of these houses has a ruin [...] built, in which are placed various figures and fragments of walls and columns, which have been brought from the remarkable ruins lately discovered in Central America and Mexico. The countenances and their headdresses resemble greatly those of Egyptian statues. I was struck in particular with a Sphinx-like countenance and a head similar to that a priest of Isis. This ruin and its ornaments in the midst of a wild, romantic rocky and wooded promontory was a design in the best taste (Bremmer 1853: I: 38)

It is noteworthy that Bremmer referred to Ancient Egypt in order to describe the Central American and Mexican antiquities, thus running against the ideas pursued by Stephens and Catherwood. However, the analogy served to incorporate Mesoamerica within the category of 'ancient civilisation'. Besides, by pointing out the good taste of the monument and of its location, this author participated in the artistic re-evaluation of Pre-Columbian monuments. In addition, Bremmer's narrative shows that visitors associated the *CIM* display with a series of emotions associated with the idea of 'ruin' as a Romantic motive of landscape appreciation.

We do not know whether the interpretation of *CIM* evolved throughout the rest of the nineteenth century. However, by the beginning of the 1900s, major changes took place in the Hudson Valley area. As the local landscape became redundant, the original elite progressively abandoned the old residences, which was coupled with the increase of a middle-class population. No evidence has so far been found regarding the perceptions of *CIM* among this new potential audience. However, these local transformations finally influenced the ultimate destiny of *CIM*: by 1909, Miss Katherine Turnbull, Cruger's heir, offered the original sculptures and bas-reliefs to the American Museum of Natural History (here and after AMNH) of New York (AMNH SC M. Saville to H. Bumpus 9/11/1909). In 1919, this museum acquired the antiquities, and eventually put them on display as the only surviving collection from Stephens' and Catherwood's expedition. In a paradoxical reverse, the state of decay of *CIM* –which had been at the core of its appreciation under the aegis of Romanticism– was then interpreted by authorities of the AMNH as an element affecting the value of the original sculptures and bas-reliefs. Today, *CIM*, a ruin of a ruin in a grave state of degradation, still stands in its place, but

almost forgotten, if not for random ghost-search visits by reporters and students of nearby Bard College (Figure 32).

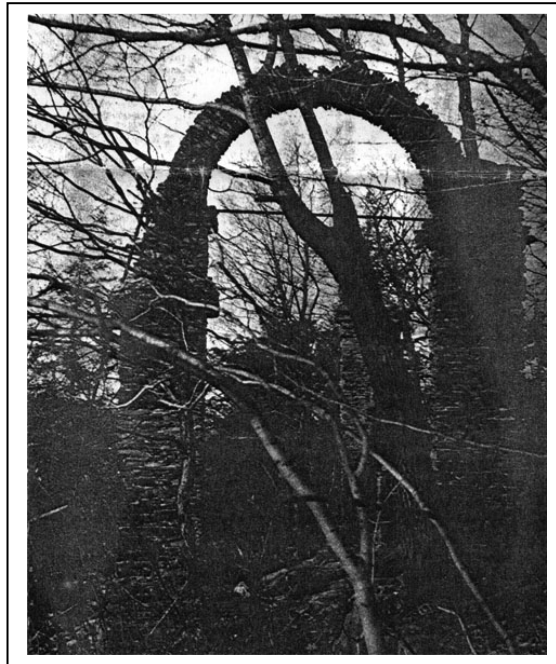


Figure 32. Cruger Island Monument *circa* 1970  
(From Santora 1971, Courtesy of the AMNH Archives)

#### 5.4. CONCLUSIONS

This chapter showed how early to middle nineteenth-century British and American exhibitors displayed Mesoamerican settlements, buildings and sculpture. It also demonstrated how display representations were considered to be of great importance for showing Pre-Columbian monuments in Britain and America for two reasons: the first, to arrive at a hypothesis regarding the origin and antiquity of the Mesoamerican inhabitants and the second, to provide information on the cultural complexity of the Mesoamerican monuments. Both issues were critical for deciding the level of sophistication of the Mesoamerican culture as compared to Europe and Ancient Egypt, among others. Finally, the answers to these questions served to formulate two types of interpretations about Pre-Columbian societies, as we shall review further.

From 1824 to 1850, Americans and Britons developed a series of new display practices to exhibit Mesoamerican monuments. These practices were evident in the production of the exhibitions.

### 5.4.1. Production

Early and middle nineteenth century Mesoamerican exhibits employed a novel series of production strategies for presenting textual and visual information about Pre-Columbian monuments. These included referring to primary sources such as the conquerors who had witnessed the Pre-Columbian settlements and buildings firsthand. An example of this was the ancient Mexican capital, Tenochtitlán, where the temples were still in use at the time of the Conquest. Cities were also represented in exhibits by cartographic media –either indigenous maps or copies–, as well as by survey plans produced by the explorers. These resources showed the extent, density and complexity of Pre-Columbian sites.

Exhibition producers carried out complex production processes for the exhibition of buildings, which often initiated *in situ* and were later completed at the exhibition space. These included the production of varied types of three-dimensional media: the recreation of architectural spaces, the elaboration of models, and the erection of life-sized ruins. Exhibitions could also be presented in two-dimensional representations of buildings with watercolours, engravings, and panoramic spectacles. Display producers also employed casts to represent monumental sculpture, including exact copies, reproductions and reconstructions.

The production of these media involved considerable resources, effort and risks. Paradoxically, the production of casts for presenting Mesoamerican monuments required more skill and work than acquiring, transporting and exhibiting original antiquities. For that reason their exhibitor/curators gave great value to these representational media, which was reflected in the predominant position that they occupied in the exhibition spaces.

Chapter 4 analysed the political context behind the production of *AM* in Britain. This chapter contributes to understanding the political agendas that determined the production practices of Mesoamerican exhibitions in the U.S. during the mid 1800s. Indeed, the exhibitions derived from the *Incidents* cannot solely be considered as part of ‘consular archaeology’, but rather formed part of a more complex process in which diplomatic bodies, private investment, and individual agencies participated in antiquities collection, media production, and exhibit creation.

### 5.4.2. Representation

During the nineteenth century, two modes of display were deployed for the representation of Mesoamerican monuments. On the one hand, Bullock’s *AM* attempted to recreate and bring to life the Pre-Columbian Past. This exhibit functioned as a time machine which aimed to represent the past from its own perspective; however, the effect was mere artifice, for *AM* was really a partial and speculative Western interpretation of how the Mesoamerican world might have been like. On the other hand, the displays associated with the *Incidents* represented the

Mesoamerican past from the point of view of the present. Therefore, they aimed to retrieve the past framed into the conceptual discourse of the 'ruin': the Mesoamerican antiquity served as the object of artistic admiration, as a manifestation a new American national identity, and a surrogate travelling experience for nineteenth century American society.

Early and mid 1800s displays of Mesoamerican monuments employed textual, visual and spatial strategies to articulate ideas about these cultural manifestations in interaction with the public. As explained, *AM* employed a scaled-down model of the Pyramid of Teotihuacán to represent Pre-Columbian architecture. The model was associated with the original building, its meaning, its shape, and its appearance by virtue of the nature of the modelling process. Additionally, the guidebook spoke about the size of the original building, its mode of construction and the general aspect of the archaeological site where this monument was situated. The use of the model, its location at the display, and the narratives involved in its exhibition served to articulate the idea that Mesoamerican architecture was characterised by its monumentality. Hence, an array of technologies of display served to formulate ideas about Mesoamerican architecture, its characteristics, and its nature. These technologies also served to substantiate the veracity and authority of the display's arguments.

Displays also represented new interpretations of Mesoamerican monuments. As far as we know, it was not until the twentieth century that archaeological records of the interior of Aztec temples became available. However, *AM* aimed to recreate the interior of a Mexican Temple, through the blending of the original architecture of the Egyptian Gallery with the new, Mesoamerican ornamentation décor. It also placed sculpture casts of monumental sculpture in a specific arrangement. The result was a fresh, and rather dramatic, representation of the appearance and organization of a sacred Pre-Columbian architectural space with no precedents in the history of Mesoamerican archaeology.

Early and middle nineteenth-century displays of Mesoamerican monuments also articulated conceptual representations. For example, instead of representing a type of building *CIM* aimed to formulate a conception of the Pre-Columbian 'ruin'. This conception materialised into the shape, form and aspect of *CIM* whose representation fulfilled a double-folded aim: on the one hand, it evoked Mesoamerican monuments as Stephens and Catherwood found them, described them, and depicted them *in situ*; on the other, it served to generate a link with the ideas and the emotions that the 'ruin' had acquired within Western culture, particularly under the aegis of Romanticism. Furthermore, *CIM* constituted an innovation in the ruin-making tradition since it incorporated original antiquities into the fabric, which, in turn, added an effect of authenticity to the representation. The link between the 'ruin' and the original Pre-Columbian monument was additionally reinforced by the location of *CIM* at a prominent spot of Cruger Island on the shores of the Hudson River; both aspects evoked Kabah's 'Isolated Arch', an architecturally ruined element described by the *Incidents*. Therefore, a net of complementary visual, textual and

spatial languages were set in motion not just for representing Pre-Columbian monuments, but also for formulating ideas about them and the ways that Britons and Americans interpreted them during the first half of the 1800s, a period generally understudied in the history of archaeology.

Early and middle nineteenth-century British and American displays represented Mesoamerican monuments according to contemporary academic debates, particularly those regarding the cultural affiliations of Pre-Columbian societies. *AM* employed a series of visual, textual and spatial strategies to emphasise the analogies between Egyptian and Mesoamerican pyramids, thus proposing that the former had derived from the latter. Such an argument clearly followed the diffusionist theory, a body of anthropological thinking that was in vogue during the early nineteenth century. By the mid 1800s, Catherwood and Stephens rejected such theoretical approaches to alternatively propose that Pre-Columbian builders were indigenous to the Americas. By representing Pre-Columbian ‘arches’ –a distinct and original architectural feature– Catherwood’s gallery exhibitions and *CIM* aimed to emphasise the indigenous character of Mesoamerican cultures. Taking this information into account, we concluded that exhibits not only articulated theoretical frameworks, but also contributed to their dissemination, wider acceptance, and development by materialising the main arguments, by presenting evidence that substantiated them, and by elaborating ideas at the core of their theoretical grounding.

Exhibits advanced archaeological understanding by proposing new interpretations of Mesoamerica. *AM* employed the casts of monumental sculpture to formulate the idea that Pre-Columbian religion was a derivation of Asian culture. By representing a ruined arch, a monument of a once glorious culture that had inevitably decayed. *CIM* materialised Stephens’ cyclical interpretation of Mesoamerican history.

It is noteworthy that these exhibits also participated in academic debates. By exhibiting representations of complex, solid, and monumental Pre-Columbian buildings, *AM* contested late eighteenth century Enlightenment arguments regarding the lack of sophistication of Mesoamerican cultures. Both *CIM* and the gallery exhibitions of Catherwood’s illustrations of Pre-Columbian monuments served to deny previous approaches that had proposed that external cultures had contributed to the development of Mesoamerican architecture. Therefore, this chapter confirmed the idea that exhibitions played a key role in the shaping of archaeological knowledge, by generating theory-laden representations that contributed to the advancement of archaeological thinking.

Nineteenth-century exhibits of Mesoamerican monuments were related to wider social and artistic movements. *AM* exhibited a series of representations that framed Mesoamerican cultures within *Orientalism*. *CIM* was the product of the Romantic artistic movement as well as the particular developments that American architecture and landscape design experienced

during the mid 1800's. Both displays also articulated political agendas. Although Bullock recognised the complexity of Mesoamerican cultures, his *AM* representation was still Eurocentric since it implied that Old World ancient cultures were superior to those of the New World. The displays associated with the *Incidents* almost reversed this formula, proposing that Mesoamerican cultures were as sophisticated as Old World civilisations both in technological and artistic terms. In fact, by formulating the idea of "Classical Antiquity", these displays articulated a Pan-American past which could be appropriated by U.S. citizens as part of their heritage.

#### **5.4.3. Interpretation**

Audience response to the representations of Mesoamerican monuments came from a variety of sources: printed press, travelogues, personal memories, and scholarly documents. These sources were evidence of the ample types of audiences that attended and interpreted the displays.

The interpretations of the displays indicate that some members of the public were able to assimilate the ideas that the producers intended to transmit through the exhibits. For instance, some *AM* press reviews coincided with Bullock's diffusionist theories and confirmed that Mesoamerica was linked with ancient Egypt. Similarly, the NYHS *Proceedings* showed that scholars were influenced by nationalistic agendas in the appreciation of Mesoamerican images on display. *CIM*, on the other hand, was perceived under the aegis of Romantic ideals about the notion of the 'ruin'. This demonstrated the representational power of exhibits to transmit intelligible ideas between the producers and the viewers of displays. As additional examples, an *AM* press review cast doubt on the analogies between Egyptian and Mesoamerican monuments, whereas a *CIM* observer contradicted Stephens' and Catherwood's hypothesis regarding the aboriginal origin of Mesoamerican monuments, stating that these resembled Egyptian antiquities. These examples served to further the theoretical grounding that visitors played an active role in the interpretation of displays.

#### **5.4.4. Structuration**

Early and middle nineteenth century displays of Mesoamerican monuments articulated ideas about the past as a temporal category. Two strategies were employed for this purpose. As explained in Chapter 4, *AM* created a dichotomy between an ancient period and a modern epoch, in which the Colonial Period served as a marker for temporal rupture. This effect was emphasised by the *AM* guidebook, which narrated the destruction of Mesoamerican monuments. The displays associated with the *Incidents* employed another way of creating a sense of temporal remoteness regarding the Mesoamerican past, by representing Pre-Columbian



monuments as ‘ruins’: a conceptual framework that emphasised the passage of time and issues about decay. Furthermore, by incorporating Mesoamerican monuments into the conceptual framework of the ‘ruin’, *CIM* (and Catherwood’s gallery exhibitions) represented a glorious, long-gone Pre-Columbian past.

However, the most important contribution of early and middle nineteenth-century British and American exhibitions of Mesoamerican monuments is that they structured the notion of ‘civilisation’ by articulating a series of ideas through a series of display strategies, as follows:

The first strategy consisted of presenting evidence of the existence of Pre-Columbian cities. As explained in Chapter 2, urbanism was a central element of the notion of civilisation in Western thought. *AM* represented Mesoamerican settlements as large, dense, and complex cities by means of textual narratives and cartographic documents.

A second strategy was to show the sophistication of Mesoamerican architecture. Early and middle 1800s displays represented Pre-Columbian buildings not only as made of solid materials, but also as being comprised by complex architectural features, (i.e. pyramids, temples and arches). Complementarily, the displays articulated the idea that Mesoamerican peoples had developed monumental architecture. As explained in Chapter 2, complex architecture was a crucial element of the notion of ‘civilisation’ in Western thinking. This chapter has additionally demonstrated that mid nineteenth century displays incorporated Pre-Columbian monuments into the conceptual framework of the ‘ruin’, a representation that evoked the idea of a glorious long-gone past.

Displays also showed examples of monumental sculpture to demonstrate that Mesoamerican cultures had achieved technical sophistication in the development of artistic expression. However, the aesthetic valuation of these elements was generally negative. In addition, since monumental sculpture was almost inevitably linked to the meaning of ‘idols’, which belonged to a bloody, non-Christian religion, a representation that served to articulate the idea that Mesoamerica was not as civilised as the European Classical Past. Interestingly enough, the lack of sophistication of Mesoamerican religion and arts was linked to limitations in the progress of their governmental system. Thus, *AM* configured Mesoamerica as a despotic society. *CIM* also contributed to produce a negative image of Pre-Columbian cultures. Due to the association of the ‘ruin’ with moral and didactic concerns, *CIM* implicitly suggested that Mesoamerican culture had vanished due to war, a form of social degeneration.

Seminal studies on the history of American archaeology (Bernal 1980; Willey & Sabloff 1993; Trigger 1989) have overlooked the impact of early and middle nineteenth-century displays. These spectacles, although limited in number, constituted the beginnings of a long tradition. During the second half of the 1800's, both the United States and Britain initiated an aggressive campaign for the production and exhibition of cast reproductions of Mesoamerican sculpture and architecture.

Documentary evidence indicates that from the 1880s onwards, many American institutions (the

National Museum and the Smithsonian Institution, Washington, D.C.; the New Orleans World's Fair, Louisiana; the Peabody Museum; and the American Antiquarian Society, in Worcester Massachusetts) put on display collections of reproductions of Pre-Columbian monuments (e.g. Peabody Museum 1898; Smithsonian Institution 1886a, 1886b; Stall 1988; Shipton 1967). By 1884, Alfred Maudslay, a British traveller and archaeologist, had presented a number of casts of Quirigua monuments to the Cambridge Archaeological Museum (Graham 2002: 220).

However, the most extensive collection of casts of Pre-Columbian sculpture was put on display in 1893 during the World's Columbian Exposition, thanks to the collaboration of Desirée Charnay, a renowned traveller and archaeologist of French origin, (Cf. Fane 1993: 160) (Figure 33). This spectacle also showed four archaeological reconstructions of the city of Mexico, including a model of an Aztec temple. (Cf. Fane 1993: 160).

Figure 33. Désiré Charnay casts of monumental sculpture in the 1893 World's Columbian Exposition (From Fane 1993: 163)

Furthermore, some of the most popular attractions of this World's Columbian Exposition were the life-sized casts of the ruins of Mesoamerican buildings (Figure 34) produced by the American, Edward Thomson, which included the reproduction of the 'Arch of Labna'. This exhibit was presented in outside grounds between the Anthropological Building and the Midway Pleasant (Fane 1993: 160-163).

Figure 34. Life-size reproduction of a ruin of a Pre-Columbian building displayed in the 1893 World's Columbian Exposition (From Fane 1993: 163)

Several British and American museums continued to exhibit casts, models and life-sized reproductions of Mesoamerican cities, buildings and sculpture throughout the twentieth century. This tradition continues until today in the British Museum, the Peabody Museum, and the American Museum of Natural History. The significance of these representations cannot be overlooked. According to Fane (1993: 172) casts and models were a solution in that they allowed curators to construct a corpus and a context that gave grandeur and vitality to the Pre-Columbian past. These representations also allowed visitors a surrogate experience as explorers of the monuments. Furthermore, they provided the visitor with a direct, three-dimensional experience with the Mesoamerican peoples, since they represented how they transformed their environment in their daily life. The representation of the human scale of Mesoamerica was complemented by another mode of display that consisted of exhibiting living people, the subject of the following chapter.

## CHAPTER 6

### Shows of People

This chapter analyzes the third and last aspect of this research: the representation of Pre-Columbian people in British and American exhibits from the 1820s to the 1870s. My main focus is to explore how these individuals were put on display in a wide variety of settings –museums, side shows, zoos, and private audiences– in order to represent Mesoamerican cultures.

Following the methodology proposed in Chapter 2, this analysis examines the history of early and middle nineteenth century Pre-Columbian shows of people, to analyse issues about the shows' production, representation and interpretation. This information serves to understand the contribution of these types of spectacle to presenting images and messages about Mesoamerica from the point of view of the Western world. Particularly, this section seeks to explore the ways in which textual, visual, and other display strategies employed at these shows helped to structure Mesoamerica according to the notion of 'ancient civilization'.

A wide variety of historical resources are employed here: guidebooks, posters and pamphlets inform us about some aspects of the production process of the displays, including how the individuals were incorporated into the show business industries, as well as about the manner in which their managers set up a spectacle for their display. These documentary materials also serve to study the representations that these displays meant to express about Mesoamerican cultures and peoples. By scrutinizing representation strategies, this investigation also attempts to study the way in which the exhibit producers conveyed a self-image of themselves, which by derivation, served to construct an image of Western peoples. Finally, on the basis of reporter and independent visitor accounts (including those of the scientific community of the time), this chapter examines some aspects regarding the audience response to the displays' representations.

During the early and middle nineteenth century, shows of Mesoamerican people were scarcer than those devoted to Pre-Columbian objects or monuments. Until now, only two case studies have been documented, although they are poorly researched in the scholarly literature. The first is the exhibition of a Texcocan Indian named José Cayetana in William Bullock's *Modern Mexico* (1824c) and *Ancient and Modern Mexico* (1825b). The second instance is that of the *Aztec Show*, a sideshow that ran from 1849 onwards in several cities of the United States and the United Kingdom. As far as we know, both of these shows were the first ever spectacles in history that presented Mesoamerican individuals to English-speaking audiences on both sides of the Atlantic; however, the tradition of showing indigenous peoples from this cultural area and from

the rest of the Americas actually began almost four hundred years before, as the following section analyses.

## **6.1. BACKGROUND**

The Western World has a long history of displaying indigenous peoples from the Americas. Its beginnings can be traced back to the initial stages of the so-called 'Age of Discovery' (Cf. MacCall 1999: 26-54). Indeed, from his first voyage to the Indies in 1492, Columbus brought back to Europe some Native Americans, who were displayed before the Spanish Royal Court as proof of the transatlantic discoveries (Houghton 2004: 1). In the following years quite a number of Native American people were taken to Spain and Portugal as slaves, but very soon this practice was found unprofitable, and later, officially prohibited (Honour 1975: 58). Yet illicit trade of Native Americans continued until the seventeenth century. These operations played an active role in supporting European colonial enterprises since indigenous people were often conceived of as one of the most important of the New World's resources (Houghton 2004: 1).

After the sixteenth century, Native Americans were also brought to Europe to receive education that would enable them to act as teachers and diplomats (Houghton 2004: 1, Foreman 1943). Two centuries later, Native American leaders often visited Europe in order to engage in political negotiations (Foreman 1943; Cline 1961, Dickason 1984; Feest 1987a, 1987b).

Whatever the reasons for their visits to the Old World, American Indians quickly found themselves treated as objects of curiosity (Houghton 2004: 2). The attraction that they exerted on Europeans rapidly evolved into a variety of forms of exhibition. Commercial forms of entertainment emerged at an early date: in 1501, Bristol witnessed a public show of Eskimos (Kishenblatt-Gimblett 1991: 402). Displays rapidly developed into complex spectacles. For instance, by the mid 1600's, Brazilian Indians were displayed in Rouen as part of a recreation of a whole indigenous village, a setting that served for performing a dramatic battle for celebrating the coronation of the new King of France (Kirshenblatt-Gimblett 1998: 402). During the following centuries, spectacles of Native Americans took place in a number of contexts: fairs, zoos, exhibition rooms, circuses and private presentations (Cf. Foreman 1943; Feest 1987a, 1987b; Altick 1978; Dickason 1984; Maxwell 1999). The demand for these spectacles could be measured on the basis of two facts: on the one hand, entrepreneurs recruited individuals to masquerade as American Indians in a variety of shows; on the other, some European men claimed to be Native Americans themselves to make a living in *show business* (Cf. Foreman 1943: 150; Moses 1996:20). Towards the second half of the nineteenth century, when 'the frequency and diversity of the shows of 'exotic peoples grew steadily' (Rothfelds 1996: 164), presentations of Native Americans became commonplace both in the ethnological business, Wild-west shows, informal spectacles, and in World Fairs (Altick 1978: 276-286; Greenhalgh 1988: 86-178;

Benedict 1983; Adams 2001: 44-55; Griffiths 2002 3-86). Indigenous peoples of the New World were then also presented and studied in academic arenas (Griffiths 2002: 86-123). This process coupled with the production of textual and visual representations of Native Americans produced by Europeans, which were published from the 1500s to the 1800s in several types of formats: travel literature, photographic albums, ethnographic studies, etc. (e.g. Gidley 1992; Moffit & Sebastian 1996; Sayre 1997; Maxwell 1999; Adams 2001; Mason 1998, 2001; Griffiths 2002).

Mesoamerican peoples participated in this historical phenomenon. In 1528, Cortés presented a group of indigenous chieftains, jugglers, and ball players before Charles V in Toledo (Honour 1975: 58-62). It is not clear what the specific ethnic description of these individuals was; however, a series of fascinating and vivid visual representations of their performance, produced by the draftsman and medallist Christopher Weiditz, identified them as Mexicans (Figure 35).

During the late sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, Mesoamerican Indians continued to appear in European courts either as members of the nobility, as evidence of the newly conquered populations, or as political envoys of their own communities (Cf. Cline 1961: 70-90; Gibson 1991: 159-164). This state of affairs changed dramatically in the course of the following two hundred years, when Mesoamerican Indians rarely visited the Old World. However, seventeenth and eighteenth century French, Italian, German, and English actors played the role of Moctezuma, the last Aztec emperor, in theatre and opera plays (Keen 1984: 222-223).

Figure 35. Mexican Indian performing in the Spanish Court during the sixteenth century, by Weiditz (From Honour 1975: 70)

No evidence survives of the actual performances, the stage-sceneries or the costume designs employed during these spectacles. Yet some scripts revealed the way in which European play writers formulated particular images of indigenous peoples for public consumption. For instance, John Dreyden's epic *oeuvre*, *The Indian Emperor*, which opened with great success in London in 1665, represented Moctezuma as a magnificent, stoic, melancholy and pagan leader – an image that was inspired by Cortés' description, as well as popularised by textual and visual representations produced by seventeenth century European artists (Cf. López & McEwan 2010: 280-287) (Figure 36).

It was not until the nineteenth century that Mesoamerican peoples were reincorporated into European ‘show-spaces’ (Poignat 2004: 7, Medina González 1999); however, these spectacles were in short supply. So far, only the two case studies mentioned above have been recorded for early and middle nineteenth century England and the United States. However, literature on museum history, Western leisure media and American archaeology have overlooked the histories of the exhibition of a Mexican Indian in *Ancient and Modern Mexico* (hereafter *AMM*) and *The Aztec Show* (hereafter *AS*). Yet a remarkable aspect of both of these shows was that their performers were presented as links to or actual representatives of Mesoamerican cultures.

Figure 36. Portrait of Moctezuma from the late seventeenth century, attributed to Antonio Rodríguez (From López & McEwan 2010: 286)

The removal of indigenous peoples from the margins of the known world to be displayed in European and North American cities has a long tradition that shaped the development of ideas about Westerners themselves as well as non-Westerners (Cf. Poignant 2004: 7). Indeed, these spectacles marked the emergence of the modern world as a spectacle for ‘alterity’, for they served for the cultural construction of ‘Otherness’ (Hallam & Street 2000b: 1-10).

A large body of literature on anthropology and mass entertainment has been devoted to analyzing the history of these and other types of exhibitions, the biography of their performances, as well as the academic, social, and political contexts and implications of the shows, with a particular focus on the nineteenth century colonial circumstance (e.g. Bogdan 1988; Clifford 1988; Coombes 1994; Kirshenblatt-Gimblett 1991; Lindfords 1999; Mitter 2000; Jordanova 2000; Hallam 2000; Landau & Kaspin 2002; Gould 2011). Nevertheless, these studies failed to notice that this period also witnessed a variable number of contexts for displaying the human dimension of antiquity. Indeed, during the 1800’s, some theatrical plays, operas and shows presented actors and actresses performing the roles of ancient Egyptians, Romans and Greeks within settings that emphasised the monumental grandeur of Western Antiquity (e.g. Said 1993: 134; Ashley 1989; Prettejohn 1999: 157-172; Miller 2007).

*AMM* and *AS* represented special examples of both of these traditions for, as this chapter will demonstrate, these exhibits presented ‘living performers’ in order to structure the notion of a non-Western ‘ancient civilisation’. Furthermore, textual, visual and other technologies of display actively contributed to the expression of a particular idea of the Western ‘Self’: the ‘archaeological hero’. Therefore, *AMM* and *AS* deserve a place within the development of

archaeology for they constructed an axis of difference, both spatial and chronological, whose implications are worthy of further examination.

## **6.2 THE ‘NOBLE INDIAN’ AND THE ‘WESTERN COLLECTOR’: JOSÉ CAYETANA IN *MODERN MEXICO* & *ANCIENT AND MODERN MEXICO* (1824-1825)**

In 1824, the British naturalist and showman William Bullock presented a Native American named José Cayetana Ponce de León as part of his exhibition *Modern Mexico* (hereafter *MM*), the twin spectacle of *AM*, at the Egyptian Hall in London (Bullock 1824c: 7-11). A year later, Cayetana was incorporated within *Ancient and Modern Mexico* (hereafter *AMM*) (Bullock 1825b). Analysis of Cayetana’s participation in these displays has been largely overlooked by nineteenth century ‘human showcase’ literature (Cf. Altick 1978; Fiedler 1978; Bogdan 1988; Greenhalgh 1988); however, as far as we know, *MM* constituted the first arena in British history that exhibited a native of Mexico. Furthermore, *AMM* deserves a place in the development of American Archaeology, for this spectacle associated Cayetana with Mexican antiquity, specifically, Aztec Culture. Interestingly enough, Cayetana’s display in both *MM* and *AMM* also served to configure an image of Westerners that was largely inspired on Bullock, his travelling experience, and his role as collector of Mesoamerican antiquities. Such formulation constitutes an early, but paradigmatic example, of the fashioning of the Western ‘archaeological hero’.

Therefore, *MM* and *AMM* configured spectacles on alterity in which the ‘Other’ was placed in confrontation to the ‘Self’, a cultural encounter that actually began with the production of the displays.

### **6.2.1. Production**

We know very little about José Cayetana before his exhibition in London. According to Bullock (1824c: 7), he was an ‘Indian from Chytla, near Texcoco’. Taking this information into account, it is likely that Cayetana was from San Andrés Chiautla, a town located on the northern border of Texcoco, that during the Post-Classic Aztec Period had constituted an *Altepetl*: an independent, political, indigenous unit associated with the Nahuatl Triple Alliance (Lockhart 1999: 15). Therefore, in spite of his Christian name, Cayetana was of indigenous origin. However, we will never know whether he was a pure Indian or a Meztizo.

According to Lockhart (1999: 15) Chiautla was incorporated into the Spanish colonial rule during the sixteenth century, a period in which this Texcocan region also came under the care of monastic orders. Thus, Cayetana’s name might have been indicative of the fact that, like many of his countrymen, he had been baptised for his conversion into the Catholic religion (Lockhart 1999: 26).



The meeting of Bullock with Cayetana was not fortuitous. In his travelogue, the British traveller explained that during his Mexican venture he had often tried to convince Mexican Indians to join him, but without success (Bullock (1824a: 42). Almost at the end of his trip, Bullock (1824a: 43) was approached by Cayetana, who offered his services as domestic servant: it was only then that the 'Mexican Indian' was convinced to cross the 'terrorific waters' to London. We do not know whether or not Bullock was explicit about his intentions for integrating the Cayetana in a display but, in contrast with other nineteenth-century spectacles (Cf. Poignant 2004: 7, 59-69; Holmes 2007), it appears that Cayetana's displacement from Mexico and his engagement in *AMM* was not carried out through violent capture, forced removal, abduction or other violent means.

As explained above, Cayetana was initially exhibited as part of *MM*, the twin-display of *Ancient Mexico*, which was located in a downstairs room of the Egyptian Hall, London, in 1824. *MM* aimed to present a recreation of Mexico's state as a newly independent country (Medina González 1998: 8). To fulfil this purpose, Bullock employed a variety of display technologies. The end of the gallery showed a panoramic view of the Valley of Mexico taken from the Palace of Tacubaya, which had been originally drawn by Bullock, Jr. 'on the spot' (Bullock 1824b: 6). This life-size drawing showed Mexico City and its main buildings surrounded by distant mountains (Bullock 1824b: 11). At the front of it, the gallery was refurbished to reproduce a 'native garden', which was composed of models of diverse aboriginal plants (including the Agave, the Manitas, the Yucca, and the Paw-Paw), reproductions of local agricultural products (gourds, calabashes, etc.), and stuffed animals (porcupine, armadillo, etc.) (Bullock 1824b: 11-16). The garden was flanked by a full-scale reproduction of a rural hut with a thatched roof built of palm leaves. According to the *MM* guidebook, this 'Mexican cottage' was 'inhabited by one of the aboriginal Indians' of Mexico (Bullock 1824b: 12). This was, of course, José Cayetana, whose portrait appeared at the front of his shed in the panoramic frontispiece of the exhibition, drawn by Aglio for publication in the display guidebook (Figure 37).

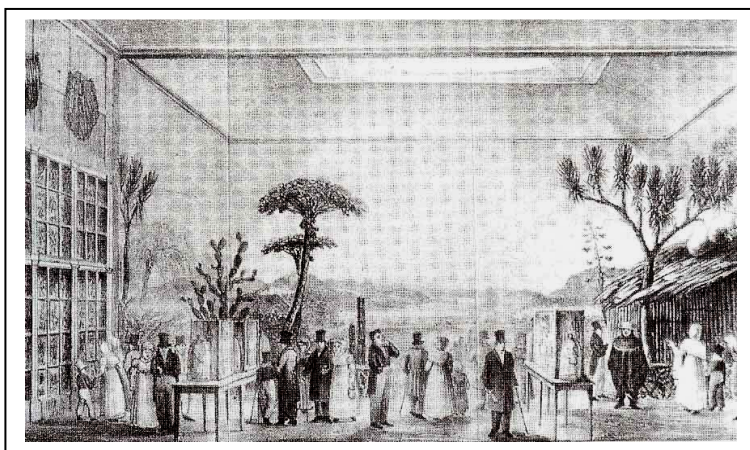


Figure 37. Panoramic view of *Modern Mexico*  
(From Bullock 1825b)

By 1824, Bullock already counted with experience in the *show business* of displaying native people. Two years earlier, the Egyptian Hall had exhibited a Lapland family in a setting representing a Nordic landscape (Bullock 1822). It seems that this spectacle not only enjoyed considerable popularity (King 1996), but also served as a major source of influence for the production of *MM* (Medina González 1998: 48). Indeed, like the *Lapland Show*, *MM* aimed to stimulate interest in a region poorly known by early nineteenth-century Britons, by recreating a simulation of their landscape and natural resources. *MM*'s simulation of the Mexican country size was the result of a complex production process, which included modelling botanical specimens; preserving, mounting and reproducing dead animals; as well as recreating a setting. The technical details that involved these procedures were not properly recorded by Bullock, and therefore, are still unknown; however, it is clear that the British showman tried by all means to reproduce the Mexican reality by giving the 'atmosphere as much verisimilitude as possible' to its original (Bullock 1824b: 10). Furthermore, *MM* was set up as a learning experience: by displaying some botanical specimens 'opened' into cross sections, this display promoted scientific examination, thus constructing the visitor as a 'serious observer rather than a simple pleasure seeker' (Coombes 1994: 88).

*MM*'s stage was crucial for articulating Cayetana's identity as a Mexican Indian, for it represented his place of origin, housing and way of living. By the same token, Cayetana played a significant role reinforcing the authenticity of the display scenery. As Aglio's engraving showed (Figure 38), he wore the typical clothes of the Mexican countryside men –*folke rancheros*–, whose appearance was depicted in many nineteenth-century traveller paintings of Mexico (Figure 39).

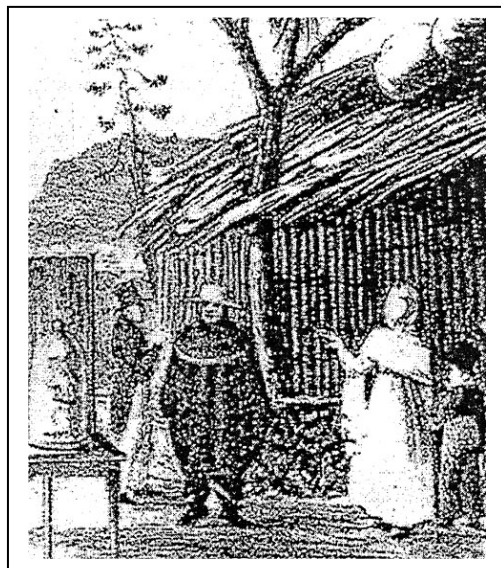


Figure 38. Jose Cayetana in *Modern Mexico*  
(From Bullock 1824cb)



Figure 39. Mexican *ranchero* engraved by F. Lehner *circa* 1850 (From Michaud y Thomas & Prodhomme 1850)

Cayetana's presence at the display gave vitality to its setting. It is not clear whether or not he actually lived on the stage, like whole communities of non-Westerners did in the ethnographic villages of the late nineteenth-century World's Fairs (Greenhalgh 1988: 84). However, *MM* encouraged the visitor to believe so by suggesting the Indian way of life through the presentation of a native household, including domestic hardware, utilities, and clothing within the 'Mexican hut' (Bullock 1824b: 12). Therefore, it seems that *MM* depended on the presentation of particular customs and domestic performances, both of them common display devices employed by contemporary exhibits of Bushmen, Kaffirs or North American Indians (Cf. Altick 1978: 276-286). In fact, *MM* production greatly contributed to transform the domestic life of Mexican Indians into a public spectacle. In this sense, Cayetana's display at *MM* was a forerunner of a mode of exhibiting ethnographic subjects that was brought into perfection and wider dissemination by the late nineteenth-century anthropological displays at World's Fairs (Kirshenblatt-Gimblett 1991: 402).

Cayetana's participation in *MM* was two-fold. On the one hand, he constituted a fixture of the exhibit. On the other hand, he played an active role in the display since he acted as a 'living interpreter' of the show. His abilities to accomplish the latter task were initially limited since, as the *MM* guidebook mentioned, Cayetana spoke Nahuatl, Spanish, and a little Italian (Bullock 1824c: 12). However, by 1825, when *AMM* was configured into a single spectacle, Cayetana had already overcome his own communication restrictions. As a contemporary press advertisement announced (*LIG* 1825: 222), the Indian used the English language to guide visitors through the exhibit.

This transformation of Cayetana's role in Bullock's displays was without precedent in the history of *show business* in Britain. Furthermore, this spectacle echoed a relevant historical interaction between the history of Western entertainment and the development of American archaeology: *AMM* was the first time that a Mexican Indian was exhibited as a link with the Mesoamerican past (Medina-González 1998), a representation that was expressed by a series of technologies of display.

### 6.2.2. Representation

*MM* formulated an active representation of Mexico since its scenery and contents were constructed both as sources of information and as speakers of experience. According to the guidebook, the model of the aloe was not only a genuine representation of this plant, but it 'will better explain [the process of extraction of *pulque*] than can be done by words' (Bullock 1824b: 14). Thus, the display's narrative reinforced the power of visual language at the display. This operation also involved the validation of incorrect perceptions that created a false authenticity as in the case just mentioned, for *pulque* comes from the Maguey plant, not from the Aloe.

The relationship between reality, truth and experience was critical for legitimizing the representation created by the display. Indeed, the guidebook narrative constructed the exhibit as supplier of information, by stating that:

It would perhaps be thought to be attaching too much consequence to this exhibition, were it stated that all [...] knowledge might be procured here (Bullock 1824c: 5-6)

Furthermore, *MM* was articulated as an educational experience during which the public could acquire the knowledge that Bullock had gained during his Mexican trip. Coombes (1994: 69) has suggested that in the African exhibitions, panoramas, dioramas and cosmoramas of the Victorian era, the spectator was constructed as an explorer. *MM* was an early precursor of this form of entertainment: an advertisement that appeared in Bullock's travelogue announced that in the exhibition 'visitors [were] transported as it were to the actual country'. Thus, based on these claims, *MM* was constructed to be not only as an exhibition of the Mexican reality, but as modern Mexico itself.

The representation of Cayetana within this display rationale is worthy of examination. As explained before, he was first and foremost a fixture of the display. As a consequence of this, he was subjected to a process of objectification: the display guidebook actually described Cayetana as an 'object of merited attention' (Bullock 1824c: 7). Additionally, the panoramic view of *MM* shows a visitor pointing a finger at the Mexican Indian, as if he were a mere thing (Figure 38). It is likely that this process of objectification served to reduce the moral anxieties involved in scrutinising and putting on display an actual human fellow, thus making observation respectable: an act of neutral exploration. In this sense, *MM* was a predecessor of the late nineteenth century ethnographic displays that achieved the 'transformation of human beings into materials of examination' (Greenhalgh 1988: 82-85).

As explained before, no independent data confirms whether Cayetana was purely indigenous, as Bullock (1824c: 12) contended, or a 'mestizo' of both Indian and Spanish ancestry. However, *MM* formulated an identity for Cayetana: he was a representation of a particular sector of the Mexican population: the 'Indian' (Bullock 1824c: 12). No evidence exists on Cayetana's opinion about this identity. However, this process of categorisation implied two conceptual transformations. On the one hand, *MM* represented Mexican Indians as a homogenised population, regardless of the great ethnic diversity of the native inhabitants of Mexico. On the other hand, by following this rationale, the display conveyed the idea of an archetype of the 'Mexican Indian'. This double-folded operation allowed the guidebook narrative to move freely, from focusing on a singular entity (Cayetana) to referring to the general category (the Mexican Indians), and *vice versa*.

Bullock's travel narratives (1824a: 38, 50, 198, 349, 469) insisted on the intelligence, mild character and learning aptitudes of the Mexican Indians. Accordingly, the *MM* guidebook

(1824a: 12) described Cayetana as ‘docile and extremely intelligent, apt at learning whatever is proposed to him ... ingenious in mechanics (Bullock 1824b: 12). This archetypal representation certainly fitted the particular historical conjunction of the early nineteenth century, a period during which Britain developed a new economic interest in the recently independent Mexico, for *MM* indeed portrayed ‘Mexican Indians’ as perfect potential workers for British business enterprises.

The archetypic representation of Cayetana at *MM* also reflected some principles developed from the late eighteenth-century Enlightenment philosophers, who generally ‘assumed no fixed position or consensus in their thinking regarding American Indians, but rather tended to employ them, or their way of life, metaphorically in praise or condemnation of European civilisation’ (Bieder 1986: 6). Bullock’s travel narratives (1824a: 38, 50, 198, 349, 469) continuously expressed of nostalgic admiration regarding the noble nature of Mexican Indians.

Accordingly, the *MM* configured Cayetana within the conceptual framework of the myth of the ‘Noble Indian’ (Ellingson 2001: 10). Its guidebook stated that the Indian was ‘simple and content, his wants consequently few’ (Bullock 1824b: 12). The humble fabric of Cayetana’s hut and the simplicity of the material culture associated with his life contributed with this conceptual configuration. The incorporation of Mexican indigenous peoples into the conceptual framework of the ‘Noble Indian’ was further reinforced by *AM* through the description of Moctezuma, who was described as an unfortunate king with mild character and (thus) dominated by ‘superstitious beliefs’ (Bullock 1824b: 28). Through this move, Bullock’s displays formulated a prototype of the Mexican Indian, whose characteristics transcended time. Such a conceptualization was reinforced by a sense of continuity between Pre-Columbian and modern Mexican Indians: Bullock’s advertising campaign sustained that Cayetana was ‘one of the only Mexicans Indians who had visited Europe’ since the natives sent by Cortes to the King of Spain (Bullock 1824c: 12).

*MM* was first and foremost a spectacle of alterity. The dichotomy between Mexican Indians and European peoples was articulated through a series of textual, visual and spatial display technologies. For instance, the exhibit setting –a recreation of Mexico’s countryside– contrasted greatly with the urban life of 1820s London in which the Egyptian Hall was placed. The ‘Mexican hut’ made of perishable materials served to emphasise the Indian’s ‘proximity to nature, indeed a proof that his way of living was more comparable to animals rather than European men’ (Greenhalgh 1988: 84). The guidebook additionally followed the formula of many nineteenth century exhibitions by making comparative statements that implied the superiority of the Western World (Medina González 1998). For instance, Bullock was described as a seasoned traveller, whereas the Mexican Indians were said to fear travelling to Europe, since this experience was seen as ‘dreadful as the voyage to the Moon’ (Bullock 1824c: 12).

The display also used indigenous material culture to articulate a representation of an axis of difference between Western and non-Western cultures. Thus, the *MM* guidebook explained that the Indian's rain cloak could be easily substituted with 'British ingenuity', a statement that further suggested the opportunity of considering Mexican Indians as potential clients for the British textile industry.

*MM* represented the opposition between Western superiority and non-Western inferiority by further constructing a temporal categorization. Bullock's travelogues insisted that Mexico was 'three hundred years behind Europe in every species of refinement' (Bullock 1824a: 202-203), a view that the display guidebook metaphorically synthesized by stating that this country was 'the Dorado of the Elizabethan times' (Bullock 1824c: B). These statements created the effect that Mexico was what England had been in previous epochs, thus formulating the idea that 'the past is a foreign country' (Cf. Lowenthal 1985). Similar idealisations can be found in the accounts of sixteenth-century European travellers to America who frequently imagined they were visiting ancient or biblical times (Sayre 1997: ix). These representation of time acquired special significance during the nineteenth century: as Fabian (2002: 144) has explained, the denial of 'coevalness' within the anthropological discourse of alterity constituted an ideologically construed instrument of political power, which can be recognised as part of the claims for justifying the domination of 'Others'.

Further contributing to the construction of alterity, *AM* formulated a self-fashioning image of Bullock who became a representative of the Western explorer. Indeed, the immediate context for this exhibition was the eighteenth- and early nineteenth- century history of scientific expeditions that, in exploring geographical frontiers, aimed to expand European knowledge of distant places and cultures, thus helping to create the science of geography and ethnography (Aguirre 2005: 13). Within this context, travel writing contributed both to create a discourse about 'Otherness' and to shape the figure of the Western traveller explorer (Cf. Pratt 1992). Following this logic, Bullock's travelogues portrayed his Mexican venture as an act of heroic exploration, whose principal aim was to acquire scientific information (Bullock 1824a: v-vii, 28). Collecting natural specimens and antiquities were described as a central component of this scientific endeavour (Bullock 1824a: 64, 70-71, 183-187, 273, 330).

*AM* constructed a rhetorical narrative in which collectibles and their collector acquired new significance within a discourse of 're-contextualization' (Cf. Appadurai 1986: 28). Its guidebook explained that the 'jealous policy of Old Spain ha[d] prevented Europe from acquiring correct information on the subject of Mexico, its conditions and antiquities' (Bullock 1824c: 2). Through this narrative, Bullock surely proved his superiority as collector. Furthermore, he constructed his exhibition as a product of laudable actions, since this gathered Pre-Columbian objects that were unique and exceptional. In fact, the guidebook (Bullock 1824b: 20) added value to his collection of Mexican antiquities by pointing to their scarcity, since Spanish

Conquerors had ‘employed all means to efface every vestige and recollection’ of Pre-Columbian times.

Additionally, the English traveller described the lengths to which he went searching for and acquiring antiquities, claiming that he rescued them ‘from the oblivion and safely transferred [them] to England’ (Bullock 1824c: 22). This narrative, therefore, constructed Bullock as the legitimate rescuer of Pre-Hispanic Mexican Heritage. Similar narratives could be found in late nineteenth century discourses that claimed conservation duties in order to justify the appropriation of the antiquities from many parts of world (Cf. Coombes 1994: 121).

Interestingly enough, the guidebook also made the exhibition appear as the appropriate place for the preservation of the Pre-Columbian collection, thus implying that they were safe, because they were in England (Bullock 1824c: 22). As Coombes (1994: 121) has suggested, it was this rhetoric based on the ‘necessity of conservation and preservation’, which validated the growth of many ethnographic collections during the expansion of European Imperialism in the late nineteenth century.

Taking the above information into account, *MM* can be truly considered a forerunner of Victorian ethnographic exhibitions that articulated a discourse of human difference within an imperial rationale (Greenhalgh 1988: 82-88; Medina González 1998: 37). In fact, Aguirre (2005: 2) has followed this trend of thought, by recently proposing that both *AM* and *MM* laid ‘the ideological groundwork for British informal imperialism’ in both Mexico and Central America. Nevertheless, these conclusions tend to simplify the significance of Bullock’s exhibitions since they failed to notice the unique character of their representations. Cayetana’s display at *MM* serves to prove this point since four representation strategies made it entirely different from other nineteenth century exhibitions of non-Western peoples.

- First, Bullock neither took Cayetana’s identity away, nor transformed it completely, to make his exhibition more appealing for the visitors. In fact, *MM* employed the Indian’s own name and articulated a representation that recognised his own individuality. Furthermore, Bullock (1824a: 12) pointed to some personal qualities of Cayetana; for instance, by stating that he was ‘the only one of these countrymen that could be induced to leave his home for Europe’.
- Second, *MM* did not attempt to categorise Mexican Indians along racial lines (*contra* Aguirre 2005: 32), a representation that actually concurred with the historical development of British anthropological thinking, which did not see the rise and popularisation of racial determinism until the second half of the nineteenth century (Harris 2001: 108-121). Actually, the display never focused on the Indian’s physical attributes, nor made use of them to attract attention to the spectacle, as many 1800’s colonial exhibitions did (Maxwell 1999: 15-133). No display technology was employed

either to scrutinise Cayetana's body, as was the case in the 1810 display of Sara Baartham's, the so-called *Hottentot Venus*, who was exhibited in 1810 in the Egyptian Hall (Holmes 2007).

- Third, *MM* described Mexican Indians on the basis of their mental, moral and other non-corporeal qualities, including their learning, working and communication abilities. In fact, language skills played a key part in the representation of Cayetana, for as explained above, the guidebook stated that he could speak several tongues. Understanding the importance of language in Cayetana's representation requires further consideration regarding the significance of this trait within Western thought, particularly within the discourse of alterity. According to Pagdem (1993: 18), 'for most Greeks, and their cultural beneficiaries, the ability of the use of language [was] the clearest indications of man's powers of reason [and which also] distinguished humans from other animals'. Such a distinction was incorporated into the notion of the 'barbarian', whose original Hellenistic meaning referred to someone who could not speak the Greek language. It appears that this correlation evolved throughout history until the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, when a series of Western scholars posed that language effectively marked the frontier separating humanity and beasts (Stroher 1999: 5). Eighteenth-century Enlightenment thinking maintained this trend of thought, by stating that language was a reflection of reason, the mental quality that defined both humanity and its progress towards civilization (Bieder 1986: 24). This belief, although eroded, persisted amongst many Europeans throughout the early nineteenth century (Bieder 1986: 24), a period during which several Western 'human shows' employed language as a powerful marker of 'Otherness'. For instance, Sara Baartham –*the Hottentot Venus*– was represented as a creature devoid of language to emphasise her cultural 'inferiority' in relation to European men (Stroher 1999: 5). *MM* differed from these spectacles by actually encouraging dialogue between the Indian and the public. This attitude was confirmed by the panoramic view of *AMM*, which depicted Cayetana interacting with a visitor (Figure 40).



Figure 40. José Cayetana speaking with a visitor of *Ancient and Modern Mexico* (From Bullock 1825b)



By 1825, Bullock employed the Indian's communication skills for propaganda, advertising that he conducted guidance of the display in the English language (*LIG* 1825: 222). No evidence survives from Cayetana's narrative; however, the fact that it existed and was publicly recognised was remarkable within the context of nineteenth-century ethnological show business.

- Four, *AMM* represented Indians as links to Mexican antiquity. Indeed, as explained before, by stating that Cayetana was 'one of the only Mexicans Indians who had visited Europe since the natives sent by Cortés to the King' of Spain, the display guidebook conveyed a sense of cultural continuity between the Pre-Columbian Indians and their modern counterparts. This operation contradicted the principles of the 'process of monumentalist invention', which established that the 'links between the societies being archaeologised and their contemporaries remained obscure, indeed, irrecoverable' (Pratt 1992: 132). Furthermore, it is noteworthy that, on the basis of his linkage to Pre-Columbian cultures, Cayetana served for formulating another problematic representation, which differed from the conventional principles of *Orientalism*. Indeed, Said (1978: 122-148) and Rashed (1980: 1-11) have proposed that one of the related arguments underlying the process of appropriation of ancient civilisations by nineteenth century Western Orientalist scholarship consisted of arguing that the modern inhabitants were unfit to analyse or arrange their own history and culture. Concomitantly, Orientalist discourse (Said 1978: 121) constructed the paradigmatic figure of the Western hero, who rescued 'the Orient from obscurity, alienation and strangeness [since] his research reconstructed the Orient's lost languages, mores and even mentalities'. It is clear that *AM* structured the representation of Aztec Culture along with ideas at the core of the notion of 'ancient civilisation' (see Chapter 4 and 5). Furthermore, this display certainly represented Bullock (and by derivation the Britons) as the legitimate rescuer and interpreter of Mexican Antiquity. However, this rhetoric was not entirely monolithic since the guidebook explained that Cayetana was 'well informed on the history and affairs of his country' and encouraged the visitor to engage in a dialogue with the Mexican Indian (Bullock 1824c: 12). Thus, within the oppressive atmosphere of the display of the 'Other', Cayetana's representation was remarkable for it gave a dignified position to Mesoamerican Modern Indians, who were represented as capable of interpreting their own antiquity to Europeans.

Unfortunately, no information survives regarding Cayetana's views on Mexican antiquity and Bullock's representation of it. This greatly contrasts with the number of responses produced by

Western reporters, which inform us about the variable interpretations generated by Cayetana's display in early nineteenth century London.

### 6.2.3. Interpretation

Newspapers devoted a great deal of attention to Cayetana's representation at *MM* and *AMM*, which indicated the attraction that Indian's presence exerted amongst British audiences. Furthermore, the reporters actively responded to Cayetana's representation, by expressing different opinions regarding the manner in which Bullock displayed this individual. In addition, they contributed to shape the image that the exhibition articulated in relation to Cayetana, in particular, and the Mexican Indians, in general.

The *London Magazine*, for instance, recognised the importance of Cayetana in the general arrangement of the display, by stating that he was 'the most interesting *object* [of these] foreign curiosities' (*LMM* 1824: 522, *my emphasis*). Furthermore, by employing such terminology, as well as by categorizing Cayetana as a 'living specimen' (*LMM* 1824: 522), this periodical both accepted and popularised the 'objectification' of the Mexican Indian in the early nineteenth-century British show business. Such an attitude was not strange at the time. According to Bogdan (1988: 121), Victorians rarely considered it a matter of concern that non-Western peoples or freaks were 'objectified' in displays.

However, it appears that some visitors to *MM* considered this treatment of Cayetana far from appropriate. Indeed, the 'objectification' of the Mexican Indian might have been too obvious and offensive to those still influenced by the principle of human unity derived from the philosophical stance of eighteenth-century Enlightenment (Bieder 1986: 24; Trigger 1989: 57). *The Times* (*TMN* 1824a: 5) expressed this perspective, by asking its readers: 'Is the Indian to be a fixture, like the stuffed birds and fishes?'

Yet, refuting Bullock's views was not common amongst press reporters. None of them contradicted the idea that Cayetana was originally from Mexico or that he constituted a representative of this country's indigenous population.

Similarly, it appears that Bullock's anti-Orientalist representation of Modern Mexican Indians was not only accepted, but also further elaborated on by members of the display audience. Indeed, a press reporter confirmed the link of Cayetana with his Pre-Columbian ancestors (*NMM* 1824:163). The *New Monthly Magazine* (*NMM* 1824: 163) recognised the capability of modern Mexican Indians to interpret their antiquity, by announcing Cayetana 'could read Aztec manuscripts'. This statement acquired a special significance in the context of early nineteenth century archaeology for its expression coincided with two remarkable breakthroughs in the study and decipherment of two ancient writing languages: Egyptian hieroglyphs and Cuneiform

script (Schnapp 1996: 298, David 2000: 71). In fact, the *Classical Journal* (1824: 29: 189) decided to contextualise Bullock's displays within this historical conjecture, by referring to the work of F. Champollion, the French linguist who had found the key for deciphering Egyptian writings in the early 1800's (David 2000: 17). Nevertheless, the reporter of this periodical actually took an Orientalist perspective by stating that European researchers would soon achieve the decipherment of Mexican manuscripts, a statement that suggested that the true interpreters of Mexican antiquity could only be Western scholars.

It appears that *MM*'s audience also followed Bullock by treating Cayetana with some respect. Indeed, no evidence suggests that viewers were ever interested in scrutinising the individual along physical or sexual lines. These attitudes constituted proof of the dignified position that the Mexican Indian occupied in Bullock's display representation. Furthermore, this position reflects the ideology at the core of British early nineteenth century anthropology: rejection of racial determinism (Harris 2001: 77). Opposing contemporary conventional representations of 'Others', press reviews emphasised Cayetana's mental and communication skills: for instance, the *London Magazine* (LMM 1824a: 522) explained that the Mexican Indian appeared 'very sensible and *communicative*' (*my emphasis*). Therefore, it might have been the case that since 1824 Cayetana was already playing tour-guide and, thus, contributing to the representation of modern Mexico for British visitors.

It is noteworthy that the reporters were never interested in recording Cayetana's opinions regarding the display. For this reason, the Indian's narrative regarding his experiences during the exhibits will be never known. In this sense, the cultural encounter was only valid from the point of view of Westerners, an attitude that implicitly conveyed a sense of superiority regarding non-Western peoples.

Taking this information into account, it is clear that the responses to Cayetana's representation were diverse, and even contradictory. In contrast, the press showed a rather monolithic interpretation regarding Bullock, which confirmed his formulation as a 'Western archaeological hero'. For instance, the *Classical Journal* (CJJ 1824: 29: 186) stirred its readers' imagination by exaggerating the conditions in which the British traveller had gathered the display's collection, by stating that the antiquities had been 'found in the possession of a multitude, from his destroying hands each work' had been obtained.

This narrative not only reflected and disseminated the 'fear of mobs' that large segments of early 1800's British *bourgeoisie* experienced after the devastating events of the French Revolution (Cf. Harris 2001: 53) but it also reinforced the idea that Westerners had the right to appropriate non-Western artefacts on the basis of conservation duties. In addition, this rhetoric served to praise Bullock's superiority as collector since, as a reporter expressed, the Mexican exhibitions showed

that he ‘had done not only what no Englishmen, but no European had done before’ (CJJ 1824: 29: 185).

Several authors have suggested that the growth of collections in England, as well as in other Western countries during the nineteenth century was to a large extent a reflection of geographical exploration, the colonial enterprise, and increasing competition between European nations (Cf. Brauholtz 1953; Coombes 1994; Greenhalgh 1988). Some interpretations of Bullock’s exhibitions about Mexico concurred with this historical framework. In addition to praising *AM* due to its originality and richness, the press explained that the lack of previous exhibits on the Aztecs could cause an avid desire on the part of the viewing public to see the collections (CJJ 1824: 29: 175). Such a greedy response was expressed by a reporter of *The Times* (TMN 1824: 4: 9), who after visiting Bullock’s exhibitions, asked: ‘Why is this collecting exceedingly meagre? Why have we not much greater assortment of objects to illustrate the civil and religious customs of these singular people?’

Naturally, such arguments served to demand an increase of Mexican antiquities in England, a claim that proved that displaying has historically generated an impact on collecting practices. Additionally, it is worth considering that some reporters employed Bullock’s exhibits to elaborate further criticism regarding the development of antiquarian research in England. For instance, the *Classical Journal* (CJJ 1824: 29: 175) compared the scant support given to British archaeology with the increasing patronage given to French antiquarian investigation, whose resultant knowledge served to extend political and commercial influence on other territories. Therefore, this article showed that, as early as 1824, Britons perceived that the development of archaeology was linked to local political agendas (see Coombes 1994: 107).

Almost 25 years later, both English-speaking audiences could attend to another exhibition of Mesoamerican living people, whose rationale was though entirely different to *AM*, *MM* and *AMM*, as the following section will show.

### **6.3. A ‘DEGENERATE INDIAN’ INTO AN ‘ARCHAEOLOGICAL FANTASY’: THE *AZTEC SHOW* IN THE US AND THE UK (1849-1870)**

In 1849, New York City saw the opening of an exhibition displaying two indigenous children called Maximo and Bartola, whose attraction first and foremost relied on the rationale of the display of ‘Human Oddities’ (Bogdan 1988). Apart from their unusually small size, both individuals suffered an illness today known as Microcephaly, a condition characterised by a small pointed head that is often associated with mental retardation (Bogdan 1996: 34). A marketing strategy quickly propelled Maximo and Bartola to stardom as 1851 marked their debut as the ‘Aztec Children’ (*TAC* 1851).

The *Aztec Show* (hereafter *AS*) was a unique case in the history of show business world-wide, for it was the first time that 'living people' were displayed as belonging to a Mesoamerican culture before English-speaking audiences. In addition, this spectacle deserves a special place in the history of American archaeology for it posited an archaeological fantasy: the discovery of a large city lost in the jungle where Indians were still living according to Pre-Columbian customs and religion. Such a fascinating narrative, as well as the very aspect of Maximo and Bartola, surely stimulated American and British scholars to subject the *AS* to close scrutiny. Their opinions on the show, their performers and their representation contributed to the understanding of Pre-Columbian peoples, in particular, and Mesoamerican cultures, in general, for nineteenth-century Britons and Americans.

The *AS* was a spectacle that lasted for almost fifty years, a period during which Maximo and Bartola were put on display before audiences from several American and European cities (Bogdan 1988: 160; Rothfelds 1996: 158-160, Mitchell 2002: 60). This section focuses on the first twenty years of the show, which included its presentation at different venues of the United States and the United Kingdom.

Rich sources of information survived from this epoch: guidebooks, different types of advertisements (posters, leaflets, programs, newspaper ads and signposts), press reviews, and academic reports, all of which inform us of different aspects of this popular example of archaeological entertainment.

Advertisements synthesised the attraction of the *AS*, both by highlighting and most likely enhancing the particularities of Maximo and Bartola, as well as the ways in which they were displayed. Since these materials were largely controlled by the *AS* managers, their content provides valuable evidence of what the display aimed to represent to its public.

Guidebooks and graphic materials additionally served to infer the representational strategies employed throughout the show.

Reviews of the spectacle published in the printed press and comments by independent viewers, including those belonging to the scientific community, offer comparative data regarding the visitors' responses to the display.

The history of *AS* has been but partially analysed by studies about freak-shows (Fielder 1978; Altick 1978; Bogdan 1988, 1996; Gerber 1996; Rothfelds 1996; Mitchell 2002) and in connection with the development of the disciplines of anthropology and archaeology (Comas 1968; Medina González 1998; Aguirre 2005). However, none has hitherto demonstrated that *AS* articulated two concepts: that of an 'ancient race' and that of the 'degenerate Indian', both of them ideas that were central for structuring Mesoamerica as an 'ancient civilisation'. Such an interesting representational process actually began with the production of *AS*.

### 6.2.1. Production

Between 1849 and 1870, Maximo and Bartola were presented as part of three different shows, whose name changed as the spectacle moved from the United States to the United Kingdom, and *vice versa*. Table 7 synthesises the early history of the *AS*, stating the different types of venues where this spectacle was staged.

<b>Table 7</b> <b>Historical Synthesis of the <i>Aztec Show</i></b>			
<b>Name of the Show</b>	<b>Date</b>	<b>City</b>	<b>Venue</b>
The Aztec Children	1851	Boston	Washington Hall Foot's Hall Horticultural Hall Boston Natural History (TAC 1851),
	1852	New York	Society Library (International Magazine 1852, in the ASL1931)
The Aztec Lilliputians	1853-1855	London	The Hannover Rooms The Leicester Rooms Meeting at the Ethnological Society Private audience with British Royalty (Bogdan 1988:130; ATN 1853a; Conolly 1855; Aguirre 2005:103)
	1855	Liverpool	Liverpool Zoo (Bogdan 1988:130)
The Aztecs	1870-1890	New York	Barnum and Bailey Circus (Buchanan-Taylor 1943, in Bogdan 1988:132)

As this table demonstrates, the *AS* was a quite flexible spectacle that could be staged in popular, aristocratic and academic platforms, which proves that all these display environments enjoyed a degree of permeability among each other. This also means that the managers of *AS* were able to promote the *AS* before different types of audiences.

During their long career, Maximo and Bartola had at least six managers, including the famous American showmen, businessman, and entertainer Phineas Barnum (1810-1893) (Buchanan-Taylor 1943 in Bogdan 1998; for a biography of Barnum see Bode 1987), Unfortunately, not much information about the producers of these exhibitions survives, which also limits our understanding regarding the rationale that lay behind the transformations of the show's name; however, it is noteworthy that the association of the display with Aztec culture endured throughout history, thus constituting the main trademark of the spectacle.

Such an association was established since the very origins of the *AS* through its guidebook, a document whose whole title is worth quoting: *Memoir of an Eventful Expedition into Central America, Resulting in the discovery of the Idolatrous City of Iximaya, in an unexplored region; and Possession of Two*

*Remarkable Aztec Children, Descendants and Specimens of a Sacerdotal Caste (Now nearly extinct), of the Ancient Founders of Ruined Temples* (Velazquez 1850). Following the format of a travelling memoir attributed to Pedro Velazquez (1850), this pamphlet fabricated a seductive origin for the 'Aztecs'. This narrated that a group of American, British and Canadian travellers had recently discovered Iximaya, a large city with 'Egyptian walls', 'domes of oriental style', 'mosque-like buildings' and temples with Assyrian statues. However, Iximaya was not a simple archaeological site that combined architectural elements of some remarkable ancient civilisations, for it had remained lost in the Central American jungle for centuries. Furthermore, according to Velazquez' memoir Iximaya's distinctive feature was that it was a settlement inhabited by indigenous peoples, who were still living according to Pre-Columbian customs and religion. Taking this narrative as a basic plot, the *AS* further elaborated a mythic origin for Maximo and Bartola. Following Velazquez (1850: 2-6), the idolatrous Iximayan society venerated the 'Kaanas', an order of priests whose laws prohibited intermarriage outside their caste. This rule had generated individuals of diminutive stature and reduced intellect. Maximo and Bartola were identified as two orphan Kaana children, who Velazquez (1850: 6) had taken with him after escaping from Iximaya.

We know nothing about the author of the Iximaya legend, but it is clear that his/her narrative formulated a paradigmatic archaeological/fictional tale, which was comprised of three main features.

- A wonderful location: a city that combined features of diverse ancient cultures, including the Egyptian, Assyrian and Oriental, as seen in the architectural elements mentioned.
- A mystery: an archaeological site that had remained unknown to Westerners for centuries.
- An ultimate archaeological fantasy: the discovery of an ancient society that was still operating under the rule of extraordinary human beings.

It is not known how and why the Iximaya legend was configured; however, it responded to a particular historical context, for the *AS* emerged during a vogue of public interest regarding archaeological explorations in various non-European locales. Indeed, from 1849 onwards, Europeans saw the publication of Carl Richard Lepsius' *Monuments of Egypt and Ethiopia*, (1810–1884), a 12-volume archaeological study that became the most important source of Egyptology in the nineteenth century. That same year, Henry Layard's works in Assyria achieved great notoriety among European and American readers, a phenomenon bolstered by the successful reception of *Niniveh and Its Remains* (1849), newspaper reviews of the archaeological explorations, and the popular exhibition of Assyrian sculptures in the British Museum (Caygill 1996: 31; Bohrer 1998). Simultaneously, an increasing curiosity for Mesoamerican cultures arose

amongst middle nineteenth-century North Americans and Britons, due to a number of reasons. To begin with, William Prescott's *History of the Conquest of Mexico* (1843) set a literary precedent that fired the romantic imagination for both the splendid societies of Pre-Colombian Mexico and their subjugation by the Spanish Conquistadores. An ongoing concern about the pictorial representation of American antiquities was revealed in the works of a number of artists, photographers, and draftsmen who visited Mexico and Central America during the 1830s and 1840s (Manthore 1989:92). This ran parallel to the publication of various travelogues describing Mesoamerican ruins, especially those located in Chiapas, Yucatan and Central America (Norman 1843; Stephens 1841, 1843). In addition, from the first third of the nineteenth century onwards, several displays on Mesoamerican antiquities and monuments were opened both in New York City and London (see Chapter 4 and 5). Interestingly enough, from 1850 to 1860, Central America and Mexico became a favourite putative source of origin of prodigies for the freak-show business. 'Zip, the What is it?' –the most famous 'missing-link' of the Victorian period– was originally advertised as having been captured in the mountains of Mexico (Bogdan 1988: 160). Advertisements from the mid-1800s announced that Julia Pastrani –the Baboon Lady– came from Central America (Altick 1978: 284).

Velazquez' account was not only inspired by this cultural milieu, but also responded to it. Various passages describing the discovery of Iximaya resembled Prescott's narrative of the sixteenth century siege of Tenochtitlán, the Aztec capital. Furthermore, Velazquez (1850: 3-12) quoted Stephens' works in order to vouch for the veracity of his account. In fact, the basic plot of Iximaya's discovery can be traced back to *Incidents* (Stephens 1841), since this actually referred to a legend of a living city hidden in the Central American jungle. Thus, the Velazquez' memoir exploited the idea of Stephens' geographical lacunae and its implications: the unexplored region, the city never reached, the ancient culture rediscovered and the metaphor of the 'ruined temples', themes that were artistically depicted by Catherwood's engravings (Cf. Aguirre 2005: 101). The Iximaya legend also put on operation the Victorian desire to mobilise human specimens for possession and display, both as human curiosities and as objects for ethnological research (Greenhalgh 1988: 82-85). Furthermore, as Aguirre (2005: 110) has recently pointed out, the *AS* capitalised on the editorial success of the *Incidents*, by shaping the North American explorers of Iximaya to closely resemble Stephens' and Catherwood's personalities and respective roles in the expedition.

In comparison with the colourful and detailed narrative of the Iximaya legend, no accurate or reliable information survives about the true origins of Maximo and Bartola. However, many independent sources from the early stages of the *AS* speculated about their place of provenance: some argued that Maximo and Bartola were indigenous from Mexico, whereas others stated that they were mulatto twins from El Salvador (Medina González 1999: 54). No much information is known about the manner in which Maximo and Bartola were incorporated into the sideshow



business. According to a recent research (Rothfelds 1996: 159), ‘a Spaniard named Ramon Selva convinced the children’s mother to let him take them to America; instead, however, he exhibited them in cities in Central America and then sold them to an American entrepreneur’ who took them to the United States and Europe. Details regarding the introduction of Maximo and Bartola in the freak show business will probably never be fully known. Yet, family financial needs, deceived transactions, human trade and abduction of individuals were not uncommon reasons for the introduction of performers within this entertainment industry (Cook 1996: 144; Pognat 2004: 7, 59-69; Holmes 2007). We do not know whether Maximo and Bartola willingly participated in their display (*contra* Bogdan 1998: 13). Indeed, the production of *AS* casts into doubt issues of volition at the freak-show business (Gerber 1996: 39), since ‘the Aztecs’ were limited in decision-making due to mental disability and young age.

Recent research on freak-shows has proposed a constructivist approach to the history of displaying physical difference, by advancing the idea that the ‘freak’ is an ‘invention’ or a ‘social construct’ that results from a series of practices of display (Bodgam 1988, 1996). Thus, rather than conceiving this spectacle as essentially offensive to humanity, some scholars considered the freak show as a largely legitimate business, which was based on artistic or cultural concerns valid for a given time and place (Gerber 1996: 38). The production of *AS* partly contradicts these views since it clearly shows that their managers attempted to create fascination regarding a physical disability in order to naturalise human exploitation of individuals with clear mental limitations. However, the practices of ‘enfreakment’ employed in this show were key for representing Maximo and Bartola as ‘Aztecs’, as the following section will demonstrate.

### 6.3.2. Representation

The Iximaya Legend constituted a major display strategy for shaping the representation of Maximo and Bartola, since it described their origin in an unknown place, far away from Europe: the Central American jungle. This exotic location explained and justified the idea that Iximaya had remained unknown until its discovery by Western explorers. Therefore, the display guidebook articulated an archaeological/fictional trope that combined elements of mystery, discovery, and adventure. It also formulated an archaeological epic characterised by dramatism, since this account described that, after being kidnapped by the Kaans, Velazquez (1850: 6-7) had heroically escaped from Iximaya. Thus, this narrative configured Velazquez as the only survivor of the exploration, its sole witness, and the ultimate ‘archaeologist hero’ who had recovered key links for interpreting an ancient culture. As such, Maximo and Bartola represented the perfect code breakers of the mysteries of antiquity. Stephens’ *Incidents* (1969 [1841]: 195-197) had actually speculated that the inhabitants of the unknown lost city could ‘solve the mystery that hangs over the ruined cities of America, [by reading] the inscriptions on its monuments’. For

this reason, the American explorer had proposed conquering this city, justifying such an endeavour in scientific terms (Stephens 1969 [1841]: 196). Thus, during a period of intense world exploration, the *AS* nourished the spirit of adventure of both archaeological expeditions and colonial expansion.

However, it would be misleading to consider that the *AS* was a mere production of imperialist thinking (*contra* Aguirre 2005), for this spectacle articulated a whole set of complex ideas, whose context and meaning ought to be properly analysed to appreciate their historical significance. As explained before, the Iximaya legend focused on describing the main physical characteristics of Maximo and Bartola. Furthermore, this narrative provided an explanation for their appearance, which was complemented by a series of visual representational strategies. To begin with, posters, promotional leaflets and booklets of the *AS* followed a basic formula for visually representing ‘the Aztecs’: almost invariably, drawings and engravings depicted them in profile (Figure 41). Such a depiction translated into a configuration of alterity since it expunged the opportunity for interaction between the viewer and the viewed through a caricatured silhouette that isolates difference (Holmes 2007: 27). In addition, these portraits emphasised the narrow form of Maximo’s and Bartola’s small heads and the prominent angle of their faces. Such a representation was not innocent since it served to put the physical features of the ‘Aztecs’ in contrast with that of an archetype of White man (Figure 42), a comparison that emphasised difference, by placing an axis of normality/abnormality between Western and non-Western peoples.



Figure 41. Pamphlet of the ‘Aztec Show’ *circa* 1850 (Courtesy of the Museum of the City of New York)

Figure 42. Visualising Alterity in the ‘Aztec Show’, *The Illustrated Magazine of Art* 1853 (From Aguirre 2005: 117)

Such an approximation for the representation of the ‘Aztecs’ bears a significant relevance in the historical development of anthropology. As is well known, craniometry had been employed for studies on physical anthropology at least since the late seventeenth century, particularly in French academic circles (Taguieff 2002: 32). However, it was during the first half of the 1800s that this discipline attracted scholarly attention in the United States due to the investigations of the physician and natural scientist Samuel Morton (1799-1851). For more than ten years, Morton amassed a collection of hundreds of human skulls from all over the world in order to try to find a way to classify them according to a logical and systematic criterion (Dain 2002). As a result of his research and inspired by some common theories of the times, his major work *Crania Americana* (1839: 113) posed the idea that the intellectual capacity of a ‘race’ could be judged by the cranial size of their members. This argumentation served to propose a racial hypothesis regarding the Native Americans that ran along with political agendas of the time: this stated that the mental faculties of American aborigines presented, from infancy to old age, a ‘continued childhood’, which limited their capacity for learning and education (Morton 1839: 115). Thus, visual strategies developed by the *AS* served to incorporate Mesoamerican cultures within the language of craniometry, thus, popularising racial determinism through entertainment formulas.

Britain ‘was not a major centre of physical anthropology during the first half of the nineteenth century’ (Stocking 1987: 67, *contra* Aguirre 2005: 108). Therefore, the *AS* contributed to disseminate racial theory from American to British audiences. Such introduction was not easy, since the language of race had only begun to gain adepts among British ethnologists by the mid 1800s, thanks to the publication of R. Knox’s *The Races of the Man* (1850), Thurnam & Davis *Crania Britannica* (1850), and Latham’s *The Natural History of the Varieties of Men* (1850).

Advertisements of the *AS* also conveyed another important physical attribute of Maximo and Bartola: their diminutive stature. This feature was emphasised either by comparison with a ‘standard’ figure, or by contrasting numerical values of their stature and their age. In fact, their diminutive size and young age were determinants for the configuration of the show’s names, as ‘Aztec Children’ and ‘Aztec Lilliputians’ (*my emphasis*).

Stature, cranial size, and head morphology were traits that the *AS* employed first and foremost to assert the singularity of Maximo and Bartola among ‘normal peoples’. In fact, these physical characteristics served to vouch for their value as ‘human oddities’, as one advertisement clearly stated:

These celebrated curiosities differ materially from any specimen of humanity, heretofore seen, being most diminutive in stature [...] there is nothing dwarf-like in their actions and appearance [...] as specimens of humanity they are perfectly UNIQUE.’ (TAC 1851)

Previous studies on *AS* have described this exhibit as a paradigmatic example of the melting between the ‘freak show’ and the ‘ethnographic display’ –the tradition of displaying non-western peoples for European audiences– (Altick 1978: 284-286). In fact, Bogdan (1988: 119-145) has noted that the nineteenth century witnessed an increase in the degree of permeability between these two types of spectacles. As a matter of fact, by this period human oddities and exotic peoples not only shared stages of exhibition along with displays of animals (Lindfords 199: ix; Ucko 2000:74), but also exchanged a series of long-standing narratives.

Since the Middle Ages, European myths, oral history, and written accounts have portrayed ‘the Other’ as a stranger, foreigner, or alien who possessed physical, spiritual and/moral abnormalities (for an overview see Stenou 1998: 16-55). The *AS* formulated an innovative plot, which combined these traditional elements of alterity for display representation: Maximo and Bartola were physically different and therefore foreign, and *viceversa*. A pamphlet from the 1860s London articulated this formula, announcing that the ‘Aztecs’ were a ‘newly discovered tribe of human beings’ and ‘human phenomena’ discovered in a unexplored city of Ixamaya in Central America (Figure 43).



Figure 43. ‘Aztecs!’ Pamphlet produced in the 1860s in London (Courtesy of the British Library)

Historians of the ‘freak show’ have argued that during the early nineteenth century, this industry experienced a particular vogue for exhibiting non-Western people, which eventually developed into a particular concept: the representation of a freak as a ‘type’ of a foreign community (Bogdan 1988: 120). The genesis of this mode of exhibition can be actually traced back to the 1810s London display of Sara Baarhan, the so-called ‘Hottentot Venus’: a woman whose prominent body attributes were marketed as the distinctive characteristics of a particular African tribe (Holmes 2007). Yet, the association between ‘freaks’ and non-Western people began to achieve a great complexity from the 1850s onwards, since several informal shows then related certain human aberrations to particular remote lands (Altick 1978: 258). Studies on ‘freakery’ have failed to notice that the *AS* took part in this tradition. Indeed, like other notorious nineteenth-century ‘pin-heads’, such as the famous ‘What is it?’ (Gerber 1996), Maximo and Bartola’s particular aspect was associated with an exotic putative context: the jungle, the paradigmatic frontier that evokes both paradise and danger, which became a common setting for adventure and appropriation by Western explorers and the like in Victorian literature (Zirra 2003: 3). In fact, this placement bears further significance for Victorian culture, since Romantic novels configured the idea of the wild orphaned child found in the jungle, which generated a figure of ‘danger and desire’ that represented both impossible

connection and irremediable alienation (Hotchiss 2001: 435). Hence, following Aguirre (2005: 119), 'Maximo and Bartola perfectly acquired children's status as orphans, miraculously rescued from paganism and brought into civilization'. Interestingly enough, Velazquez' account never referred to the exact location of Iximaya, which thus remained mysterious, a message that was surely part of an intentional commercial package that aimed to stir public attention.

The *AS* operated further 'enfreakment' strategies for enhancing the value of Maximo and Bartola: advertisements described as 'extraordinary living wonders', 'specimens of a sacerdotal cast' (ELW 1860), 'peoples [with] no other alliance to other species', and representatives of a 'new race nearly extinct' (ATN 1853b). The last categorisation deserves our attention for a number of reasons. Studies on the history of anthropology have argued that the introduction of racial theory into British and American scholarship began during the mid 1800s (Stocking 1987: 62). However, as Stocking (1987: 63) suggests by this period the term 'race' was an intellectual notion that commonly referred to linguistic or ethnic identities, rather than to a rigid biological determinism. According to Trigger (1989: 114-120), British anthropologists and archaeologists generally resisted racial interpretations of human behaviour until the second half of the nineteenth century. Considering this intellectual context, the *AS* clearly deserved a position within the historical development of anthropology, for this spectacle not only introduced the language of race for representing a 'foreign freak type', but also shaped the understanding of racial issues, by employing them to describe a specific archaeological culture: the Aztecs.

Taking this information into account, Rothfelds (1996: 169) has pertinently used the phrase 'freak cultures' to refer to the representation of Maximo and Bartola. Indeed, the 'enfreakment' of whole communities (race, society, or culture) was an ultimate outcome produced by the translation of the peculiarities of individual performers to a group of people. *AS* conveyed this effect through a three display strategies:

- First, the guidebook pointed to the physiological characteristics of Maximo and Bartola as evidence of their association with the ancient inhabitants of the New and Old World (Velazquez 1850: 2). This relationship marked the differences, and thus rupture, between the 'Aztecs' and modern humanity, as an advertisement clearly explained:

These unique [...] creatures, so unlike in form and feature to other members of the human family [...] have no other alliance in species [...] than to the ancient races whose portraits are found on the antique ruins of Niniveh, Egypt and Central America (ATN 1853b).

- Second, by stating that the performers possessed discernible physical attributes that identified them with a particular cultural community, the *AS* manager constructed the idea of the 'Aztecs' as a separate human grouping, in effect, a distinctive 'race'.

- Thirdly, as a consequence of the previous process, *AS* exhibited a ‘human type’ by moving its centre of attention from the individual to a whole collective (society, group, or race), an aim clearly pursued by an 1860’s pamphlet of the display, which stated that:

The interest [that] a sight of them imparts is [...] not [...] only to the satisfaction of a common curiosity. They appear to offer a worthy study to those who seriously occupy themselves with the types of human organisation (BGW 1861).

*AS* was marketed according to what Bogdan (1988: 28) has called the ‘exotic mode’, a type of performance in which, ‘the person received an identity that appealed to people’s interest in the cultural strange’. The construction of Maximo and Bartola’s ‘staged identity’ (Mitchell 2002) was not simple, for it depended on the combination of various textual, visual, spatial, and performance technologies of display. For instance, the *AS* juxtaposed Maximo to a collection of Mexican antiquities in order to draw the visitor’s attention to their resemblance (Anonymous 1852 in Aguirre 2005: 113). We do not know the origin of this collection and how it became incorporated into the spectacle; however, some of these antiques were integrated into the performance, which sought to reinforce the connection of the individuals with the Aztec culture. This act consisted of presenting a Mexican Idol to the performers who ‘care[d] and fondle[d] it in a manner which plainly indicate[d] that they ha[d] seen of something of the kind before’ (Anonymous 1852 in Aguirre 2005: 113).

Promotional materials articulated further visual strategies, by portraying the ‘Aztecs’ wearing different styles and types of costumes, a strange pastiche that gave an effect of fantasy and wonder to the spectacle. Sometimes Maximo and Bartola were given outdated clothing in order to enhance their antiquity, an effect that was emphasized by juxtaposing a Western man wearing fashionable nineteenth-century clothing (Figure 42). Differences in clothing translated into a sense of distance, since Maximo and Bartola were portrayed within fictional settings decorated with enlarged hats and children’s books that increased their miniature condition, thus making



them look like Jonathan Swift’s ([1726] 2009) fictional Lilliputians (Figure 44).

Figure 44. The ‘Aztec Lilliputians’ in 1853 (From ILM 1853)

Interestingly enough, Maximo and Bartola were generally depicted as wearing costumes made of feathers (Figure 45). According to narratives produced during 1851, the performers actually did wear such attire during the exhibit (in Warren 1851).

The selection of feathers for decorating the outfits of the ‘Aztecs’ was not an arbitrary decision of the display managers. Rather, it was a clear evocation of ‘a familiar body of conceptual knowledge’ to conform an image of an unfamiliar subject (Gombrich 1961: 73). Since the sixteenth century, feather costumes were established as a sign of identity of Native Americans within the European mind (Mason 1998: 16-26). A feather skirt, a feather headdress, or feathers decorating the chest, arms and ankles were standard elements of the Amerindian attire in drawings and in the sketches of costume design of seventeenth-century ballets and festivals (Figure 46) (Honour 1975: 94-103; Boorsch 1976: 504). However, within the context of the representation of the *AS*, those feathered costumes constituted an authorised sign of identity since advertisements announced that these were ‘native costumes [of] Kaanas, of Iximaya, which have been described by those standard authorities: Humboldt, Pritchard, Prescott and Stephens’ (ATN 1853c).

Figure 45. Maximo with feather customs  
(From Aguirre 2005: 125)

Figure 46. Ballet costume designs of American  
Indians *circa* 1660  
(From Honour 1975: 103)

The *AS* also employed performance in order to enact the ancientness of ‘the Aztecs’. On the one hand, Maximo’s behaviour was associated with his supposed remote origins in time by an advertisement that clearly explained that:

The boy, in sitting down, almost invariably assumes a position in which those figures [of Palenque and other ancient cities now in ruins] are frequently placed (TAC 1851).

Therefore, throughout an *inactive* performance, the *AS* aimed to create a visual association between the living ‘Aztecs’ and the graphic representations of the Pre-Columbian monuments, an idea articulated by an image of the cover of Velazquez’s *Memoir* (Figure 47). This

Figure 47. ‘The ‘Aztec Lilliputians’ among ruins (From Velazquez 1850 in Aguirre 2005:114)

paradoxical form of anti-acting at a show meant that the monumental reinvention of Iximaya was accompanied by the petrification of Maximo, who was displayed as sculptural remains, indeed, like a ‘human ruin’. Accordingly, a pamphlet described him as a ‘member of a race kept preserved in rocky fastness’ (in Aguirre 2005: 112). The fossilisation of Maximo and Bartola was

the motive of another 1850s exhibition, since wax sculptures of the so-called ‘Aztecs’ were displayed Reimer’s Anatomical and Ethnological Museum, London. In addition, the *AS* stressed the relationship between the ‘Aztecs’ and Pre-Columbian idols through an alternative enactment. This consisted of placing ‘the little creatures on pedestals within a supposed temple’, an arrangement that served to show how Maximo and Bartola had arguably lived in Iximaya when found by Velazquez (Conolly 1855: 18). A poster advertisement suggests the way in which this scenery was set up and how

Figure 48. Advertisement the ‘Aztec Lilliputians’ as they appeared before the British royalty (From Aguirre 2005: 105)

the ‘Aztecs’ looked in it (Figure 48). Furthermore, it shows that the passive



attitude of the Maximo and Bartola greatly contrasted with the performance of a group of actors who acted as their worshippers, a performance strategy that configured an axis of difference between passive/active performers. The stage-scenery of the *AS* also confirms that representing sacred Pre-Columbian locations –i.e. temples– constituted a common strategy for displaying Mesoamerica in both the U.S. and the UK during the two first thirds of the nineteenth century.

Section 6.2.2 has already explained the significance of language for the representation of ‘Others’ in Western Culture. Thus, suffice it to say here that lack of language has been conventionally employed as a powerful signal for denoting both the difference and the inferiority of non-Western peoples. Such implications were transferred into popular spectacles during the nineteenth century: indeed, the suspension of dialogue between viewer and performer was an important tool employed in many freak shows (Steward 1993: 109). The *AS* innovated in the meaning of language within the representation of alterity since Maximo and Bartola’s lack of communication skills was employed to represent their cultural adscription and identity. Indeed, the spectacle guidebook stated that during their life in Iximaya, the ‘Aztecs’ had been kept isolated from their people for they were part of ‘a worship of silence’ (ILN 1853a: 66).

Interestingly enough, advertising clearly established a division between language as ‘aboriginal tongue’ and a ‘means of communication’, by explaining that Maximo and Bartola could understand and pronounce English words, but they were incapable of communicating to each other. Such an axis of difference clearly situates aboriginal language as inferior or limited to English tongue.

The *AS* articulated a series of representations in which the ‘Aztecs’ were ascribed other negative traits. For instance, a promotional poster suggested the inferiority of Maximo and Bartola by stating that ‘their dumbness was their sanctity’ (ILN 1853a: 66), a statement that denied the complexity of Pre-Columbian religion, by making a caricature of its ritual practice. A pathetic image of the ‘Aztecs’ was also created through performance: according to the guidebook (Velazquez 1850: 24), Maximo suffered locomotive limitations, such as lack of control and low strength, which were emphasized to the audience by making him perform certain routines. Thus, showing disabilities became a matter of entertainment in the *AS*. Furthermore, this spectacle construed the inferiority of fellow human beings, by making physical and cultural differences look harmlessly ridiculous (Johnson 1994: 185).

Comparing the representation of Maximo and Bartola with those of other early and middle nineteenth-century displays on Mesoamerica provides us further understanding of the significance of the *AS*. This show certainly represented Iximaya as a fairly sophisticated society, a state of development that was signalled by naming this settlement a city and by describing its complex architectural and monumental features, including those that resembled the traits

developed by well-known ancient civilisations. In this sense, *AS* produced an image of Mesoamerica that was similar to that generated by *AM* and evoked by *CM*. In addition, as much as *AM*, the *AS* was critical of Pre-Columbian religion; however, the latter took the idea of idolatry to its limits by proposing that Maximo and Bartola were like ‘living idols’ worshipped by a fairly absurd cult. Furthermore, since the physical and mental deficiencies of the twins became part of the show’s attraction, Mesoamerican peoples were constructed as fairly decrepit. As a consequence of this, show advertisements traced an axis of difference between the display’s viewer and its performers. For instance, a handbill announced that *AS* presented ‘the only Aztecs yet introduced to civilised white people’ (in Aguirre 2005: 103). This dichotomy expressed the conventional axis posed by alterity, thus expressing unequal relationships between the ‘West and the Rest’.

The negative representation of Aztec culture at the *AS* was certainly a product of its historical context. According to Trigger (1989: 120), the ending of the war between the United States and Mexico in 1848 ‘unleashed a flood of anti-Mexican feeling among American citizens’, which meant that Mexicans were widely agreed to be racially inferior to European Americans. As part of this process, the ethnologist Lewis Henry Morgan, doggedly ignoring archaeological evidence, maintained that sixteenth-century Spaniards had exaggerated the sophistication of Aztec culture (Trigger 1989: 120).

As much as *AM*, Velazquez’s booklet (1850: 2-3) proposed a cross-cultural relationship between ancient cultures by presenting a series of engravings depicting both Pre-Columbian and Assyrian monuments. The similarities between these societies were further enhanced by advertisements announcing that portraiture of a common ancient race could be found ‘in sculptured obelisks and hieroglyphic pictures brought from the ruins of Nineveh, Egypt and Central America’ (ATN 1853b). Taking this information into account, it was not surprising that the guidebook supported a diffusionist theory by stating that the Kaanas had originally migrated from Assyria and established an Assyrian colony in Palenque (Velazquez 1850: 3). The innovation of *AS* was that its diffusionist approach was constructed on the basis of racial categories, which meant that a whole group of ancient societies represented a race. Thus, the *AS* configured a new union for archaeology and ethnology, a relationship that J. Davis, a prominent British ethnologist, clearly asserted in 1856, by referring to these emerging disciplines as ‘twin sisters, intimately connected, and mutually supporting each other’ (in Aguirre 2005: 118).

The *AS* also proposed new formulations regarding Mesoamerican antiquity and its living descendants by accepting that Pre-Columbian societies were complex, but that their development into modern times involved decay. This coincided with a historical process of British archaeology, which, according to Stocking (1987: 71) experienced a burgeoning interest in ancient civilisations overseas due to the publication of Wilkinson’s account on Ancient Egypt, Layard’s work on Nineveh, and Stephen’s travelogue on the Maya, all of them works whose

impact ‘can actually be seen as anti-evolutionary’, for they ‘tended to sustain a *degenerationist* rather than a progressivist view of history’ (*my emphasis*). This perspective posed an innovative framework for articulating the Mesoamerican within the structuring components of the notion of ‘ancient civilization’, which can clearly be appreciated by comparing Cayetana’s representation in *AM* with that of Maximo and Bartola in the *AS*.

As explained before, Cayetana was described as having links with the Mesoamerican past; however, he was mainly constructed as a dignified representative of the modern Mexican Indian. In contrast, Maximo and Bartola were depicted as members of a Pre-Columbian society that had survived up to the present. However, contrary to many anthropologists and archaeologists of the time, the *AS* did not construct New World peoples as ‘inherently primitive or static’ throughout history (Trigger 1989: 120). In fact, the ‘Aztecs’ were never advertised or exhibited in a primitive fantasy as previous researchers have insisted (Fiedler 1978; Bogdan 1988; Rothfelds 1996, Mitchell 2002). Indeed, there was an important representational distinction between the *AS* and other nineteenth century spectacles that showed ‘pinheads’ (Rothfelds 1996, Bogdan 1988: 119-146) as ‘Missing links’ or ‘Wild-man/woman’. Whereas the latter constructed freaks as less developed ancestors (that is, evolutionary throwbacks to the childhood of the human race who were still alive in the present), the ‘Aztecs’ were represented as atavisms from ancient times, i.e. ‘living relics’ from a nearly extinct type of people. Furthermore, in Velazquez’ account, posters and leaflets framed Maximo and Bartola within a narrative that articulated the idea that they were an ancient race of Indians that had decayed throughout history (ATN 1853b, BAM 1861). Therefore, this show constructed Mesoamerican indigenous peoples as degenerate descendants of civilised ancestor(s)/cultures. In fact, a pamphlet described Maximo and Bartola as ‘members of a race [...] on the eve of physical decline and disappearance’ (in Aguirre 2005: 112). Such a representation coincided with Orientalist views about the ‘good ancient civilised orient’, which as analysed in Chapter 2, proposed that modern inhabitants were often described as degenerate remnants of a lost high culture.

Displayed as products of devolution/degeneration, Maximo and Bartola also ‘carried the warning that, just as the process of evolution had gone forward, it could also move in reverse and the ambivalent gains of the present could be lost’ (Mitchell 2002: 28, 60). This meant that *AS* was further significant for nineteenth-century society because it concerned contemporary concerns about the decay of human beings both in physical and moral terms. Not surprisingly, *International Magazine* (1851 in ASL 1931) argued that this spectacle deserved careful scrutiny not just by the physiologist, or the scientist, but also by the moralist. In fact, printed press and literature from the 1850s to the 1870s published the opinions from these different types of visitors of *AS*. Interpretations derived from these sources or data will be analysed in the following section.

### 6.3.3. Interpretation

Newspaper reviews and independent accounts referred to Maximo's and Bartola's physical attributes, agreeing on their pleasant, helpless and attractive appearance (e.g. *BT* 1851, *International Magazine* 1852 in the *ASL* 1931). Perceived as 'objects of interest and almost affection' (Conolly 1855: 12), the 'Aztecs' certainly provoked the fascination and the feelings of protective domination that many miniatures had historically awoken in the public (Mannix 1990: 15). In this sense, the children's theatrical career indeed 'illuminates the vigorous after-life of Regency and Victorian spectacle: 'its thirst for display anomalies', and particularly, its fascination with extreme irregularities, i.e. the gigantic and the miniature' (Aguirre 2005: 105). By promoting Maximo and Bartola as Lilliputians, dwarfs or 'Kaana' children, the *AS* further 'challenged the conventional boundaries between reality and illusion, experience and fantasy, or fact and myth' (Fieldler 1978: 31). The incorporation of all these elements within the show's concept attracted considerable waves of attendance to the spectacle.

According to an American newspaper, hundreds of visitors had seen the *AS* by 1851 (*Bunker Hill Aurora in TAC* 1851), a number that dramatically increased by 1854, when the show managers specified that four hundred thousand persons had paid to see Maximo and Bartola in London (Altick 1978: 285). Among the visitors were renowned politicians and members of the nobility who sometimes asked for private audiences. Such circumstances naturally increased the popularity of the *AS*, a spectacle that was surrounded by heated polemics wherever and whenever it took place. Members of the scientific community got deeply involved in debates regarding the nature and origin of the 'Aztecs', especially during the 1850s. In this context, Maximo and Bartola became raw material for analysis conducted by the different scientific disciplines devoted to the study of human variation and its development; vouched for by at least twenty three international scientific bodies, at least thirty specialists on Comparative Anatomy, Mental Medicine, Ethnology and Phrenology examined Maximo and Bartola and offered diverse explanations about their condition (ATN 1853a, 1853c; ILN 1853a, 1853b). Different hypotheses were discussed during meetings of various learned societies in which direct examination of the 'Aztecs' also took place. The scientific activity resulted in prolific studies that were widely distributed by academic and periodical publications. The press coverage distributed extracts of these studies, fuelling debate amongst scholars and the general public. Agreeing with Altick (1978) and Bogdan (1988), the involvement of scientists was, in fact, a crucial factor for the show's popularity.

A principal topic of scholarly controversy was the veracity of Velazquez's account. Already, in the early 1850s, a series of reports emerged contesting the mythic origin of the 'Aztecs'. These explained that Maximo and Bartola actually were the offspring of Indians of Nicaragua, of a diminutive tribe of Central America, of African-Americans, of mixed tribes from Central

America, or of normal villagers from El Salvador (TAC 1851; Kunhardt *et. al* 1995: 150; Warren 1851: 17; Owen 1853: 137). Some reporters urged that a ‘deputation of the Royal Geographical Society [...] extract from the showman a strict account of [Iximaya] latitudes and longitudes’, whereas Richard Cull, secretary of the Ethnological Society, announced that ‘High geographical authorities remained unconvinced’ (Cf. Aguirre 2005: 110). However, this did not prevent some journalists from considering Velazquez’s story as plausible (*Boston Advertiser & Boston Post* in TAC 1851). N.P. Willis (1851) formed part of this trend, stating that:

The ‘Aztecs’ have an unexplainable look for authenticity [...]: as if *they* were the “old family” of human nature and *we* were the mushrooms of today (in Kunhardt *et.al* 1995: 150, *my emphasis*).

Willis’ commentary suggests that during the mid nineteenth century, there was already a set of ideas associated with the image of ancient peoples. An American newspaper actually referred to this ‘body of knowledge’, by explaining that:

One can hardly help at first looking upon [the ‘Aztecs’], as belonging to the race of gnomes with which the superstition of former times once peopled the chambers of the earth, a tradition which some have referred to as the existence of an ancient race, of diminutive stature, dwelling in caverns, and structures of stones, which have long disappeared (in Altick 1978: 284).

The supposed resemblance of Maximo and Bartola with respect to human representations in Central American, Mexican, and Egyptian antiquities was recognised by those who supported the validity of Velazquez’s account (ATN 1853a, Carus 1856 in Rothfelds 1996: 159, Conolly 1855:21). Some statements showed that the visual strategies employed by the *AS* were efficient for transmitting the idea that the ‘Aztecs’ did belong to an ancient race. For instance, Richard Cull, the Secretary of the Ethnological Society of London, declared that ‘when I first saw the Aztecs [...] I was struck by the similarity of head to those figures copied from the sculptures in Stephens’ *Incidents*’ (in Aguirre 2005: 116). In addition, the *Times* (ITT 1853:07/8/8c) was convinced by the performing display strategies operated by the *AS*, since it declared that Maximo ‘burst into agony of grief and calamity’ when a Mexican idol brought to him was accidentally broken before him.

Others, however, tried to defy the Iximaya legend (e.g. Warren 1851, Owen 1853). This task proved to be problematic. Reports of a meeting of the Ethnological Society of London held in 1854 clearly showed the clash among interpretations, the nature of the evidence on which they were based, and the struggle to reach conclusions during a time when science valued authoritative knowledge as evidence. One member explained that Stephens had referred to the existence of a small race of people in America, although this statement was an invention. The Secretary of the Society simply stated that Velazquez’s account was unverified, while the former Majesty’s Judge at Havana explained that ‘he had heard no information’ about the Velazquez expedition during his residence in Belize (ATN 1853a). Dr. Owen, a specialist in comparative

anatomy, finally concluded that the scientific community had to choose between two contradictory accounts given by Mexicans of Spanish origin: these were that of Velazquez and another given by a 'native of San Salvador, Mexico' who had presented himself as the father of The 'Aztecs' (ATN 1853a). Yet, Owen did not detect his own geographical confusion.

A second point of concern for nineteenth century scholars was to clarify the nature of Maximo and Bartola. In this context, the *AS* acquired a special value for 'general inquiry derived from science' because the 'Aztecs' represented 'most interesting problems for the physiologist', that were 'worthy of being examined in questions about type and race' (ATN 1853a; ILN 1853a). Three levels of analysis were embraced in this respect:

A first level of analysis centred on clarifying whether they were dwarfs, Lilliputians or 'normal' human beings. The studies of American and British comparative anatomists and phrenologists were conclusive in this regard, agreeing that Maximo and Bartola were mere children (Warren 1851, Owen 1853, ILN 1853a: 43). This perception was confirmed by a report of the Ethnological Society which reported that Maximo and Bartola 'began to *play* with the President's pen, ink, and paper', an action that was taken as proof of their condition as children (in Aguirre 2005: 120, my *emphasis*).

A second level of inquiry focused on exploring what kind of human beings the 'Aztecs' were, which led to variable explanations. Focusing on the physical traits of Maximo and Bartola, Dr. Warren (1851), an American comparative anatomist, determined that the 'Aztecs' bore resemblance 'to some of the lower order of animals, especially those of the Simian tribe'. Dr. Owen (1853) concluded that Maximo and Bartola presented an abnormal 'arrest of development of the brain'. A study on phrenology, explained that Maximo and Bartola's 'organs of moral and reflective faculties were wanted on a rudimentary condition' as a result of a gradual deterioration of the brain in their ancestors (ILN 1853a: 43). Dr. Conolly (ATN 1853a: 825), author of many treatises on mental diseases, concluded that the 'Aztecs' resembled idiotic British children. The latter argument was confirmed by the *Journal of the Ethnological Society of London* (1856 in Aguirre 2005: 123) published an engraving that articulated craniometric knowledge by depicting a comparison between Maximo's head and the skull of an idiot (Figure 49).

Figure 49. Craniometry on operation: Maximo and the skull of an idiot (*Journal of the Ethnological Society of London* (1856) in Aguirre 2005: 123)

On the other hand, during a private audience, the ‘Aztecs’ were placed in juxtaposition with Mexican antiquities, which resulted in an exercise of mental pathology with an archaeological dimension, since Connolly (1855: 25) concluded that ‘every observer at once pronounces [an ancient sculpture] to be an idiot, who has the peculiar features of Maximo’.

However, the most complex explanation regarding the nature of the ‘Aztecs’ was developed by Knox (1853: 358) who, upon examination of Maximo and Bartola, not only recognised the ‘unmistakable resemblance’ of their profiles with the images of ancient Central American peoples inscribed on monuments, but also argued that this was proof of ‘the existence of a *race*, with such a configuration of features [...] that bear resemblance to the form of an idiotic head’. Indeed, this vilification of Mesoamerican Indians was further emphasised by proposing a theory, in which he explained the survival of the Aztecs as a result of a process in which ‘a race of men or animals may be so reduced [...] as to be thought extinct, still some remain, and such as do are of course the direct descendants of the ancient race’ (Knox 1853: 358).

All of these explanations clearly saw Maximo and Bartola as inferior to Europeans. Such inferiority was supported by alternative arguments. For example, a phrenologist stated that the children could not speak because they did not have ideas to communicate, while a physiologist explained that an atrophy of the nerves had caused their lack of vernacular language, as well as their clumsiness and stupidity (ATN 1853a). The point here to underline is that despite the scientists’ disagreement regarding the causes behind the minor state of the ‘Aztecs’, their inferiority was never contested, enjoying ‘an authoritative aura of absolute unshakeability’ validated from different approaches of science (Greenhalgh 1988: 88).

It is noteworthy that although the press published the different interpretations produced by scientists, it did not clearly acknowledge the contradictions among them. Similarly, scholars explicitly ‘avoid[ed] entering into certain questions’ demarcating the limits of their knowledge and their disciplines in a clear attempt to elude direct confrontation (ILN 1853d). Proving the internal congruence of ‘Science’ in the public arena might have been of particular importance for emerging scientific organisations such as the Ethnological Society of London. This body had recently succeeded in its establishment as a separate section within the British Association of the Advancement for Science (BAAS), overcoming the fear of some of its leading members who had stated that the recognition of ethnology might compromise the pursuit of pure science (Stocking 1987: 245). Altick (1978: 284) has suggested that ethnologists gave a seal of approval to the *AS*. This might be true; however, the circumstances also suggest otherwise: the 1850s was brief, but notable period of efflorescence of the Ethnological Society (Stocking 1987: 246); hence its advocates might have been employed the *AS* and other public exhibitions to achieve public recognition and support. In this context, it is not surprising that a review of the *AS* proposed that the ethnographic collection of the British Museum should be arranged to give a

‘view of [...] the several branches of ethnological inquiry [...] that would greatly facilitate the progress of science’.

A third level of inquiry focused on determining whether the ‘Aztecs’ represented a new *species* of the genus *Homo* or a new *race* of the human family. These discussions were of special significance within the context of mid nineteenth-century ethnology. Those years saw an increasing controversy over the origin of humankind in general, and over the origin of the Mesoamerican Indians, in particular, which was framed within the larger theoretical debates of monogenists *vis à vis* polygenists and, diffusionists *vis à vis* developmentalists. General considerations of this intellectual milieu must be explained here.

Based on the idea of the unity of man and diffusionist models, an important group of early nineteenth-century philologists and scholars of American antiquities (Albert Gallatin, Lord Kingsborough and George Bancroft) had posited explanations whereby Amerindians could trace their beginnings to the Old World (Hinsley 1981: 25; Manthorpe 1989: 95). In America, this orthodoxy was contested during ‘the two decades prior to the Civil War, [when] researchers on physical anthropology [...] challenged the Mosaic account hypothesising about the existence and development of an indigenous and isolated American race’ (Hinsley 1981: 25). Samuel Morton was a central figure in this movement. Based on craniometry, his work proposed that American Indians constituted a single, independent race divided into two families: the ‘Toltec’ who had built North American mounds and established the semi-civilisations of Mexico and Central America and the ‘barbaric’ from which the historical Indians descended. Morton’s ideas and methodology provided the empirical base for polygenist arguments on the basis of racial theory (Hinsley 1981: 26). Between 1839 and 1879, polygenism helped a number of investigators to sustain hypotheses of an indigenous American civilisation.

B.M. Norman’s *Rambles in Yucatan* (1843), a travelogue devoted to the ruins of that area, was part of this intellectual trend. Norman rejected diffusionism, proposing that a ‘primitive type of family of the human race, [had been] originally planted in the Western continent’. This idea became published almost simultaneously with Stephen’s *Incident of Travel*, which also supported that the builders of the monuments of Central America had had ‘a distinct, separate, independent existence’ from the Old World civilisations. In light of these and other works, debates on the conflicting issues of polygenism/monogenism, diffusionism/autochtonism became increasingly heated amongst middle nineteenth-century scholars of the United States, to the extent that some learned societies (including the American Ethnological Society) forbade mentioning the subject (Manthorpe 1989:94). Proposing that Maximo and Bartola were part of a new race, but somehow related to the civilisations of the Old World, the managers of the *AS* certainly inflamed controversy supporting polygenist and diffusionism theories at the same time. The key concept that they developed to support their arguments was that of an ancient *race*.



The success of the exhibit's rhetoric, disseminating this racial notion linked with antiquity among North Americans, could be observed on at least two occasions. Firstly, in 1851, Horace Green commented that there was no doubt that the 'Aztecs' represented 'a minikind race, who almost realise in bodily form our ideas of the 'brownies', 'bogies', and other fanciful creations of a more superstitious age' (In *the Aztecs at the Library Society* 1931: 18).

The managers might have aimed for a similar effect in 1855, when the Leicester Rooms of London exhibited Maximo and Bartola with a couple of African 'Earthmen', i.e. pygmy children from South Africa (ILN 1855b: 87; Altick 1978: 286). A series of activities stressed competition between the two groups, which were interpreted as testing the capabilities of two different races (Conolly 1855: 25). Apparently, the African children showed more developed physical and intellectual abilities than the 'Aztecs'. But at a time when racial hierarchy already sustained that Native Americans were superior to Africans (Stocking 1987: 26), the observer (Conolly 1855: 25) was confronted with an interesting controversy. He resolved it by concluding that the juxtaposition of the two groups was 'rather unfavourable for both nations, to the Aztecs by contrast, and to the Earthmen because [the former] improvement [was] retarded'.

One should also consider the way in which the 'Aztecs' became promoted as an 'ancient race' in later years. Clear evidence of this comes in 1884, when P. T. Barnum exhibited Maximo and Bartola as part of 'The Ethnological Congress', a show that advertised the presentation of '100 Uncivilised, Superstitious and Savage people' (Bode 1981: 25). As Adams (2001: 175) suggests, this spectacle was 'largely concerned with providing clarity and permanence to [...] racial categories'. The inclusiveness of the racial categories at the time was more than evident in the listing of the Congress' highlights, which mentioned 'Cannivals, Nubias, Zulus [...] Pagans, Indians, Wild Men, etc.'. In spite of the obvious mix of tribes, religions and races, within the Ethnological Congress 'they all also signified racial types that can never be effaced' (Adams 2001:182). This, of course, included the 'Aztecs of Ancient Mexico'.

The debate about the typological or the racial condition of the 'Aztecs' acquired a special significance when they were exhibited in Britain during the 1850s. In those years, the antagonism between monogenism and polygenism was not just circumscribed to scientific considerations. Religious and political agendas were also at issue: early nineteenth century British scholars saw polygenism as running against Christian orthodoxy. They also associated it with 'the monster of Atheism that thrived on the blood of the revolution in France' (Stocking 1987: 49): Polygenists had indeed gained wider acceptance amongst the French scholars, especially since the 1830's (Edison 1999: 760). In the wake of an evangelical revivalism, various British religious men of science felt the need to develop intellectual arguments to sustain the unity of mankind (Stocking 1987: 49). Showing the impulses of comparative anthropology, but predominately based on comparative philology, the works of James Prichard fulfilled this aim, thus reinforcing the predominance of monogenism within British pre-Darwinian ethnology in

general, and the members of the Ethnological Society in particular (Stocking 1987: 48-47). Pritchard's central concern was derivation: not progress, but origin. His ethnology, therefore, matched monogenism with diffusionism. Considering such intellectual influence, it is not surprising that British Ethnologists denied that the 'Aztecs' belonged to a new species of *Homo*; however, some of their arguments showed the impact of the new developments in physical anthropology that had taken place in the mid-nineteenth century. As a comparative anatomist,



Figure 50. Head of an 'Aztec'  
(From Brown 1873: 71)

Dr. Owen (1853) relied heavily on the physical traits to analyse the condition of the 'Aztecs'. The detailed measurements of the body, and especially of the head of Maximo and Bartola showed the influence of Morton's science of Craniometry. Racial thinking was also part of the Owen's rationality analysing the 'Aztec' case. Considering the colour of their skin and of their curly hair, he concluded that Maximo and Bartola were not genuine representatives of the American Indian race (Owen 1853). The impact of these ideas could be appreciated in later years, when racist formulations derived from physical anthropological trends were in vogue. The popular publication of R. Brown's *Races of the Mankind* (1873) comes to issue. It not only described Pre-Columbian Aztecs as an appendage of the 'American Race'; but, more importantly, it presented an illustration of a 'head of an Aztec' which clearly revealed similarities with Maximo's physical features (Figure 50).

## 6.4. CONCLUSIONS

Middle nineteenth-century American and British shows of people played a key role in the representation of Pre-Columbian cultures for Western audiences since these spectacles contributed to put Mesoamerica within the framework of 'ancient civilisation'. Both processes were quite complex and involved a series of operations: display production, representation, interpretation and structuration, as synthesised here.

### 6.4.1. Production

Displaying Mesoamerican peoples during the early and middle 1800s in the United States and the United Kingdom was not as common as exhibiting Pre-Columbian objects and monuments;

however, sources such as guidebooks, pamphlets and other information about these shows give us an idea of the wide range of variables that were involved in their production.

These displays were principally based on the exhibition of living human beings who had a connection with Mesoamerica since they had been born in the territories once occupied by Pre-Columbian indigenous cultures. Furthermore, there is evidence suggesting that some of these individuals were indigenous themselves, or at least thought to have an indigenous origin. Not much data is known regarding the lives of these individuals previous to their incorporation into show business; however, the exhibitions were the reason why they became relevant to history, even though the display dynamics sometimes imposed new identities on the performers. How these individuals became integrated into show business is not always clear; nevertheless, this process involved diverse conditions, such as: conscious consent, economic agreement, or servitude. Sometimes the performers willingly participated in the show, whereas in other cases, they might not have taken part in the decision-making process. Whatever the case may be, managers had overall control of the show, imposing unequal power relationships between them and the performers.

The participation of a Mesoamerican Indian in the exhibits was diverse since he or she was not just a fixture, but also a performer: a living interpreter, an actor, or even an exhibit guide. It is very likely that managers determined the specific role that each performer acquired for the exhibition. Yet, it appears that such decisions were also based on the physical, mental and learning capabilities of the people put on display. Indeed, Cayetana's language abilities were essential for his eventual role as guide for *AMM*. In contrast, Maximo and Bartola's physical appearance, disabilities, and mental limitations were central for marketing *AS* as a freak show.

Production managers took care of a number of aspects like designing and setting the display scenery, selecting (and in some cases tailoring) performers' costumes, and making agreements regarding his or her mode of interaction with the audience. They were also responsible for writing and creating a wide variety of advertising, guidebooks, pamphlets, and so on. It is also likely that tailors, publishers, and writers assisted the manager's tasks. We will never know whether, how, or to what extent display performers contributed to display production. Nevertheless, it is certain that Cayetana had a personal role to play as guide for *MM* and *AMM*. Guidebooks were central to the production of the display since they established the exhibit's plot narrative, the performer's identity, as well as his or her relationship to Mesoamerica. These elements were an essential representational tool, which was complemented by a series of display technologies.

*AMM* and *AS* deserve a singular place in the history of Western entertainment industry: the first, for integrating non-Western people as active interpreters of their country's actuality and past; and the second, for representing a couple of individuals with technologies of

‘enfreakment’. Both modes of display became compatible with those that characterised some late nineteenth-century ethnographic displays.

#### **6.4.2. Representation**

Shows of people represented the human scale of Mesoamerican cultures. These representations were formally active since they involved living human beings who enacted assigned roles. Display technologies involved written, visual and spatial strategies; however, due to their very nature, the shows of Pre-Columbian peoples also innovated and perfected performance strategies. In spite of their active performance character, shows of Mesoamerican people generated representations that were rather fixed and monolithic. The ‘Indian’ was a concept that homogenised the diversity of the indigenous population in time and space. As a result, displays articulated a couple of archetypes that simplified the complexity and variability of indigenous reality: the ‘Noble Indian’ and the ‘Degenerate Indian’. Each of these categories allowed displays to move from the scale of the individual to that of an ‘imagined community’ with certain characteristics. Hence, two types of indigenous communities were further constructed by the displays, as explained:

- The ‘Modern Mesoamerican Indian’, a direct descendant of the Pre-Columbian Culture and a link to indigenous antiquity. He or she was able to read native writing and interpret the Mesoamerican past for Europeans. Thus, representing the present indigenous reality looking back at its past.
- The ‘Ancient Mesoamerican Race’, an atavism of Pre-Columbian society connected to other ‘ancient civilisations’. This grouping was in a process of degeneration and extinction. Therefore, it represented an indigenous past still in operation up to the present.

Among the specific characteristics of these ‘archetypes’ and ‘imagined communities’ was a common element: ‘otherness’ which operated the language of alterity. As a result, the displays formulated two types of individuals:

- The ‘Other’: that is, a representative, a link, a descendant or a living atavism of Mesoamerican populations.
- The ‘Self’: a stereotype of the Western traveller, collector, explorer, and or scientist that became associated with the display visitor.

Mesoamerican shows of people represented this alterity through the articulation of certain axes of difference, which included distinctions in human essence, geographical and temporal distance, as well as socio-cultural differences. The main components of these distinctions are summarised Table 8.

<b>Table 8</b> <b>Representation of Alterity in Mesoamerican Shows of People</b>		
<b>Type of Difference</b>	<b>Manifestation</b>	<b>Form of Articulation</b>
Human Essence	Human-Object Animal: Proximity to Nature Physical Abnormality <i>vis à vis</i> Normality Dwarfs Lilliputians Different Human Species 'Ancient Race'	Objectification 'Enfreakment' Creation of Fictional Character Creation of Physical- Anthropological Category
Geographical Distance	Far away, unknown or ambiguous place of origin. Rural Setting/Jungle vs. Urban Setting Sacred Place vs. Place of Learning (Museum)	Construction of the Exotic Locale Translocation (There vis à vis Here) Recreation of the Unknown
Temporal Distance	Ancient Mexico vs. Modern Mexico Ancient Indian related to Modern Indian: Descendant Mexican present life resembling the British past 'Aztecs' Ancient Society still in Operation Human Ruin 'Ancient Race'	Time /Periodization Linkage Past as a Foreign Country Labelling Categorisation Creation of a visual relationship between performers and ancient monuments through imagery. Petrification Construction of an atavism from the past.
Socio-Cultural Differences	Perfect Worker Pagan/Superstitious Sacerdotal Cast 'Ancient race'	Differences in mental capabilities and potentiality. Stress on religious setting. Creation of an anthropological category: Race.

In order to construct these forms of alterity, shows of people made use of a range of written and visual technologies of display, enhancing certain physical, mental and/or moral characteristics of the individuals put on display. These traits were incorporated within the spectacle through the elaboration of display plot narratives and imagery, which were disseminated to the public through guidebooks and diverse types of advertisements. These displays also employed material culture to create a link between the performer and his or her place of origin, as well as to explain to visitors the indigenous way of life. In addition, these exhibitions implied a connection between the performers and Mesoamerican monuments. This

was done by the reproduction of a sacred architectural setting, which suggested that early and middle nineteenth century Mesoamerican exhibits were particularly interested in the religious aspects of Pre-Columbian societies. Performance was a key representational strategy for recreating essential human difference between the 'Other' and the 'Self'. In these types of shows the performers enacted forms of behaviour or played roles that differentiated them from members of Western society, including the display visitors.

Mesoamerican shows of people also formulated a series of stereotypes of 'Western man', which included: the seasoned traveller, heroic explorer, scientific collector, rescuer and conservator of Pre-Columbian remains, among others. These representations were basically derived from the guidebook narratives; however, both written and visual technologies emphasised the abnormal physical and limited intellectual capacity of Mesoamerican populations *vis à vis* an idealised, positive and, essentially superior, Western man. Therefore, the displays reflected a series of prejudices in which Mesoamerican people were generally deemed inferior to the Western population in general.

Shows of people also represented an educational representation of the human scale of Pre-Columbian societies in which visitors were constructed as the above-mentioned stereotypes of the 'Western man'. This meant that displays provided elements of the creation of an identity for both the display's performers and its viewers.

The representations formulated by these displays were in tune with the socio-political agendas that characterised their respective historical contexts. The ideas that the representations transmitted also reflected and responded to the academic developments of archaeology and anthropology, both disciplines in critical stages of development in the early and mid nineteenth century. Therefore, the displays also responded to informational and theoretical advances, thus contributing to their legibility and dissemination among visitors, as the following section shows.

### **6.4.3. Interpretation**

Shows of Mesoamerican people raised a significant number of opinions among their audience. The attraction that the displays exerted on the public imagination could actually be measured by the large quantity of responses, as well as by the generally enthusiastic reviews that they provoked in popular and academic circles.

Press interpretations responded in three different ways to the representations articulated by the exhibits:

- First, some reporters reflected the exhibit representations and further disseminated them to the public, an attitude that constituted as evidence of the power of display strategies for transmitting the producer's ideas to the public. For instance, the press

accepted that Cayetana was linked to Pre-Columbian Indians and was able to interpret Mesoamerican Codices. Reporters agreed that Maximo and Bartola were Aztecs and that they resembled human figures depicted in Mesoamerican Monuments. No press reviews cast doubt on the fact that the individuals represented at these spectacles had a relationship with Pre-Columbian cultures, which meant that displays were successful in formulating a new identity for participants as performers as well as representatives of the human scale of Mesoamerica.

- Second, some press reviews elaborated on the display representation. For instance, newspaper reviews promoted the idea that Britons accomplished conservation duties by gathering Mesoamerican objects and transporting them to England. Sometimes reporters used the displays for expressing their own ideas. For example, they exaggerated claims regarding the risks in which Pre-Columbian antiquities were in at the place of origin in order to stimulate their own collecting.
- Third, there is also evidence that the press did not always agree with the display representation, and even challenged its views. Indeed, it appears that the 'objectification' of Mexican Indians on display was not well accepted among early nineteenth-century Britons.

The above information shows us that nineteenth-century British and American displays were able to generate different responses in their audiences, proof that exhibits were complex communications media greatly dependent on interpretative processes.

Public responses to Mesoamerican shows of people also demonstrated that interpretative processes had an impact on collecting practices. Indeed, the press stirred feelings of national competition in order to stimulate collection of Pre-Columbian objects. Reporters also stimulated public interest in gathering Mesoamerican remains in Britain, by arguing that this country was a safe place for their conservation. As explained before, this rationale justified the appropriation of many ethnographic and archaeological collections from all over the world by European and American museums.

Academic responses to Mesoamerican shows of people responded to theoretical and informational advancements in archaeology and anthropology. *MM* showed British Ethnology's resistance to racial theory, whereas the *AS* appears to have contributed to the introduction of American racial theories in middle nineteenth-century British ethnological circles. These exhibitions also took part in academic debates, providing new evidence or new arguments. In this sense, responses to Mesoamerican displays of people became places for disciplinary recognition and for scientific testing of new ideas. For instance, the interpretation of *AS* ensured that the notion of an 'ancient race' became known, scrutinised, and further disseminated. Furthermore, this conceptualization as well as that of the 'Noble Indian' and the

'Degenerate Indian' acquired more recognition and acceptance than before, since audience responses failed to refute their validity.

Responses to the displays never recorded the views of the performers, however. Indeed, interpretation was a matter for Western man, a view that increased the axis of difference and superiority between him in relation to the 'Other'.

#### **6.4.4. Structuration**

Early to middle nineteenth-century displays articulated seven ideas that served to frame Mesoamerica within the notion of 'ancient civilisation':

- First, they represented Pre-Columbian cultures as fairly sophisticated societies that had achieved urbanisation and developed complex architectural features. Iximaya was not just a paradigmatic representation of the Mesoamerican settlement, but also incorporated elements that belonged to already known and comparable ancient civilizations, such as the Egyptian and the Assyrian. This incorporation facilitated the conception of Pre-Columbian cultures as belonging to the grouping category of the 'ancient civilisations'.
- Second, they represented Mesoamerican cultures not only as having features that were analogous to those of other Old World ancient civilisations, but also as links between these peoples, formulating diffusionary explanations that implied a common origin.
- Third, they articulated the archetype of the 'Noble Indian' originally appeared as a reminiscence of late eighteenth-century Enlightenment philosophy, which evolved to represent present and modern Indians as perfect potential workers in an era of European imperialist expansion in Latin America. This archetype became a prototype when it was related to Pre-Columbian notable historical figures, such as Moctezuma. The idea of the 'Noble Indian' was, however, intrinsically problematic for it ran against Orientalist theory by posing that modern Indians were capable of interpreting their past for Europeans.
- Fourth, the archetype of the 'Degenerate Indian' was an innovation of mid nineteenth-century displays, which concurred with contemporary theoretical trends in archaeology and anthropology. This archetype combined diverse types of humans in decay, for it implied the existence of physically abnormal and mentally handicapped people, leading to their eventual extinction. These traits were articulated to represent a 'freak culture', a label that evolved into an anthropological category permeated by nineteenth-century racial theory: the 'ancient race'. In so doing, the characteristics of the 'freak culture'



were construed as the identifying features of a cultural group. The archetype of the 'Degenerate Indian' also represented an archaeological fantasy: the living atavist of a Pre-Columbian society still in operation up to the present. As such, this archetype represented the possibility of Mesoamerica as code-breaker, waiting for the discovery and the aid of the Western man.

- Fifth, early and middle nineteenth-century displays articulated the self-image of their managers, producers, and creators. This self-image represented a mirror of 'Otherness', and as such, served to formulate an axis of difference between Western and non-Western peoples. The paradigmatic figure of the Western world was a male 'archaeological hero' who discovered ancient civilizations, rescued antiquities and people from danger, and conserved archaeological knowledge and items by transporting them to a safe place: the Western World. He also produced scientific explanations that were disseminated through the displays. Thus, the discoverer, explorer, rescuer, conservator and Western hero was first and foremost the exhibit's curator, who studied and presented ancient civilizations to his fellows: the display views. Exhibitions managed not only to recreate Mesoamerican Antiquity, particularly its sacred spaces, but also to serve as surrogate experiences in which the visitors became the Western archaeological heroes themselves.
- Sixth, the archetype of the 'archaeological hero' was related to a series of archaeological/fictional tropes that included exotic locales, unknown living civilizations, dramatic discovery adventures, dangerous pursuits, and the unlocking of many mysteries.
- Seventh, the most important innovation of early and mid nineteenth century shows of Mesoamerican people is that they managed to use their archetypes to create forms of identity that transcended over time.

It is noteworthy that the idea of the 'archaeological hero' was reformulated in the 1893 Chicago World's Columbian Exposition through the exhibition of Alfred Maudslay's photographs of Mesoamerican monuments, at one of the galleries in the Anthropological Building. Indeed, as Fane (1993: 160) has suggested, these images served 'to contemplate the achievements of the explorer, for they documented the actual process of discovery of the Pre-Columbian ruins in their original jungle settings'. As a matter of fact, a late review of this exhibit was explicit of the display's general effect as a surrogate experience of the archaeological adventure, by stating that 'we follow Mr. Maudslay [...] while he slowly and laboriously ploys his way into the bowels of forest-covered mounds' (Thomas 1899: 554 in Fane 1993: 161).

The idea of the Modern Indian as the ‘Noble’ descendant of Pre-Columbian cultures was also articulated in the same World Fair through the representation of a series of wax figures representing Modern American Indians, standing in the proximity of casts and photographs of Mesoamerican monuments within the Anthropological Building (Figure 51). The scarcity of clothing on the figures, the fact that they were mute, and their general aspect of ‘petrification’ produced an image of the Modern Indians that ‘became a symbol of indolence and ignorance regarding the local antiquities’, which certainly stood in contrast with the energetic Western explorer of the site (Fane 1993: 160).

Figure 51. Representation of a Modern Mayan Indian in the 1893 Chicago *World's Columbian Exposition* (From Fane 1993: 162)

The *AS* created an identity for the Aztec Culture that remained, for a considerable period of time within show business. Indeed, Maximo and Bartola continued to be exhibited as part of an archaeological fantasy for the rest of their lives. Photographs of the late 1880s depicted them wearing exotic costumes in front of a background recalling ruins lost in the jungle (Figure 52). Bogdam (1988: 132) additionally reports that during the late nineteenth century, many ‘pin-heads’ or individuals with mental retardation were promoted under the label of ‘Aztecs’. In 1883, the Cooper and Jackson Circus presented Huddy and Tain, a pair of ‘pin-heads’, as ‘The Estics’ (Mitchell 2002: 79).

Figure 52. Maximo and Bartola as presented in the late nineteenth-century entertainment industry (From Rothfelds 1996: 161)

Shows of Mesoamerican people were complementary manifestations to the exhibitions of Pre-Columbian objects and monuments. As such, the nineteenth century ‘exhibitionary complex’ of Mesoamerica needs to be analysed in a holistic and integral fashion. Such an exercise will be carried out by the following and last chapter of this investigation.

## CHAPTER 7

### Final Considerations

*The museum profession as a whole has a strange capacity for amnesia in relation to its own development [...] Awareness of museum history is [...] not an antiquarian luxury, if we believe that knowledge of the past is enlightening and liberating*

Nicholas Merriman 2001

My research analyses the development of Mesoamerican exhibitions produced in the United Kingdom and the United States during the early to middle nineteenth century. On the one hand, the results show that these exhibitions constructed Mesoamerica as an object and a discourse for examination by actively shaping archaeological knowledge that was not explicit or disseminated outside the context of the exhibitions. On the other hand, my investigation demonstrates that these displays transmitted the producers' fresh ideas about Mesoamerica to the viewers.

I conceptualise exhibits as active mechanisms for 'archaeological representation': representational systems that employ different strategies to convey ideas about the past which, in turn, serve to formulate, express and make meaningful complex notions, such as that of 'ancient civilisation'. On the basis of these conceptual grounds, my investigation demonstrates that nineteenth-century British and American displays structured Mesoamerica as an 'ancient civilisation', by articulating a language 'code'. The operation of this language code made possible for an archaeological category to be transmitted from the producers of the exhibits to their viewers.

I propose a new theoretical model that is based on scholarly approaches to the study of displays that focus on communication, signification, and representation issues. By examining the theoretical assumptions of these approaches, as well as their strengths and weaknesses, I put forward a Structural Semantic Model, the major premise of which is that exhibits convey 'ideas' that can be understood by viewers by means of a process of translation, mediated by a code shared by a given community. The theoretical underpinnings of the Structural Semantic Model have been developed further to propose Semantic Research that essentially covers three major stages: the definition of the S-Code, the testing of this code through data -namely exhibitions- and the code's clarification. The analysis of the exhibitions has been carried out following a clear method that examines production, representation and interpretation issues.

I have examined eight case studies in depth which, for analytical reasons, were divided into three types: exhibitions of objects, displays of monuments, and shows of people. Information about other contemporary displays has also been examined but in less depth due to scarcity of information. These exhibits cover both institutional and public spectacles, as well as diverse display formats, modes, and settings. Until now, no investigation has covered this great variety of exhibitions which, as a whole, represent the experience of displaying Mesoamerica in Britain and the United States during most of the nineteenth century.

I have re-constructed and de-constructed the history, production, representation and some aspects of the viewers' responses to the exhibits to fulfil a two-fold aim: to assess the connection of the displays' ideas regarding the development of archaeology; and to place the exhibits within their own social, political and cultural contexts. Hence, the research focus is on the poetics and politics of the nineteenth-century 'exhibitionary complex'. However, I take a step forward by examining the intended messages transmitted by the exhibits and evaluating how the audiences interpreted them. As such, this is an 'archaeological analysis' in the Foucault's sense of the term: 'it aims to individualise and describe discursive formations, to compare them, and oppose them to another in the simultaneity in which they are presented' (Foucault 1972: 157).

Each of the chapters has already provided a series of partial conclusions. This chapter summarises the key points of the arguments, grouped into five sections: characterisation, production, representation, interpretation and structuration. At the end of these sections, I present conclusions of a theoretical nature and suggest ways forward for future research.

## **7.1. CHARACTERISATION**

Distinctive formal features, internal variations and, conceptual traits characterised nineteenth-century British and American displays on Mesoamerica.

### **7.1.1. Formal features**

Nineteenth-century British and American displays on Mesoamerica were different from their sixteenth-, seventeenth- and eighteenth-century predecessors in many ways:

*Number, Format Variety, and Setting Diversity:* During the nineteenth century, Britain and the US produced more exhibitions on Mesoamerica than ever before in their history. These displays ranged from large-scale recreations, ornamental spectacles, performance shows and garden designs to conventional glass-cabinet exhibits. Additionally, the exhibits took place in show halls, scholarly institutions, personal premises, panoramas, institutional and

private museums, zoos, private audiences, and built landscapes. This contradicts the view that in Britain, as well as in the United States, the 'archaeology of Latin America's Great Civilisations was mainly curated in ethnological museums' (Diaz-Andreu 2007: 173).

*Access:* During the 1800s, British and American exhibits on Mesoamerica sought to attract large and varied sectors of the population extending well beyond the limits of aristocratic and scholarly circles. Thus, the exhibitions managed to become truly popular spectacles and were the forerunners of the twentieth-century mass leisure industry.

*Contents, forms of display, and display technologies:* Nineteenth-century British and American exhibits on Mesoamerica displayed a greater diversity of items than any of their predecessors: original artefacts (ceramics, stone sculptures, terracotta figurines, stone tools), fakes and copies of these objects, Pre-Columbian codices (originals and copies), reproductions and reconstructions of monuments, architectural recreations and living human beings. These contents were presented in groups and set up in complex arrangements: forms of display that were more sophisticated than any employed in sixteenth-, seventeenth- and eighteenth-century exhibitions. The displays employed a large number of display technologies that combined written, visual, spatial, object-based, performative, and scenery strategies. Used in an independent, combined or interactive fashion, these display strategies constructed a complex language that was unique and powerful in the way it conveyed ideas.

*Documentation:* Early to middle nineteenth-century American and British displays on Mesoamerica produced a large variety of informational resources about their production, representation, and to lesser degree, their interpretation: guidebooks, catalogues, registries, pamphlets, advertising, press reviews, academic reports, independent narratives, exhibition plans, engravings and photographs. Visual- and written- materials provided different sorts of information and thus complemented each other. Guidebooks were the most important innovation of nineteenth-century displays on Mesoamerica. They were written to conduct the audience through the exhibit and were meant to explain its configuration and components. Very often the guidebooks made the rationale of the exhibitions explicit or provided clues which enabled viewers to make sense of the information conveyed by the display. They also provided additional information about the objects on display and the general organisational theme. Guidebooks served publicity purposes and they had the potential to disseminate general ideas about the displays to those who could not attend the spectacles. Their content often revealed a tension between the academic point of view and the public advocacy of the exhibits in that they employed impersonal language, scientific jargon, and quotations from academic literature that might not have been accessible to a layperson. Given their pivotal role in the exhibitions, they constitute essential instruments for research on display production and

representation. Sometimes they show visual material, enabling us to get a glimpse of the exhibits' aspects, locations and formal characteristics.

*Advertising:* Propaganda in newspapers, journals and travel books was another important innovation of nineteenth-century displaying practices. Advertisements employed the language of persuasion in referring to the displays as 'the first', 'unique' or 'rare', all of which come across as positive attributes of heritage (Lowenthal 1985: 52-72). To increase the attraction to the spectacles, advertisements also referred to the quality, uniqueness, or scarcity of Mesoamerican collections, monuments (or people) in the United States and the United Kingdom. They also referred to the difficulties and risks involved in securing the contents of the exhibits, including the conflicts over the ownership of collections. Therefore, issues about heritage appropriation, whether legal or illegal, became common stunts for increasing the appeal of the exhibits. Publicity aids –as much as guidebooks– gave displays both respectability and magnetism, by portraying these spectacles as useful for scientific interest, entertainment and public instruction.

*Response:* The nineteenth century also witnessed an increase in public written responses to displays on Mesoamerica. These appeared mainly in the form of reviews published by journals, newspapers and magazines. These sources of data were neither comprehensive nor representative of the all opinions that visitors might have had about the displays. However, the very fact that they were produced means that the spectacles were attractive enough to stimulate the viewer's response, the writing of reports and their publication. Furthermore, press reports (and hearsay) might have helped displays to become known by those who could not attend, to encourage attendance, or at least to inform people about the debates regarding the exhibits. Although scarce, there are also independent responses to the displays, which appeared as part of scholarly papers and travellers' accounts. Narratives derived from academic practice provided information not only about the views of influential intellectuals and scientists of the time, but also about the academic debates that exhibits stirred. These data show that the academic and public realms did not operate separately but rather interacted.

### **7.1.2. Internal variation**

The internal variation of the nineteenth-century 'exhibitionary complex' of Mesoamerica was first and foremost determined by nationality: British or American. The tradition of displaying Mesoamerican artefacts in Britain was an old and enduring one; it can be traced back to the sixteenth century and continued, albeit in an erratic fashion, until the late eighteenth century. It flourished during the 1800s when a considerable number of exhibits of great complexity were produced both in private and institutional contexts, via display settings that were already well

established by this period. In comparison, the United States did not produce displays on Mesoamerica until the nineteenth century. Early nineteenth-century attempts to produce exhibitions of Pre-Columbian artefacts never came into being. Institutional museums were not founded until the second half of the nineteenth century. For these reasons, it was not until the mid-1850s onwards that Americans managed to create Mesoamerican displays both in private halls, scholarly societies, and museums. By this decade, the U.S. had become the birthplace of freak shows of Mesoamerican people, a unique form of spectacle that endured for the rest of the century and later.

The reasons for these national differences are difficult to discern, but one needs to consider that Britain enjoyed political stability and maritime power that facilitated access to the territories once occupied by Pre-Columbian cultures. Although Mesoamerica was closer to Americans than to Britons, the United States was still a rather new and socially turbulent political entity in the early 1800s, conditions that were not suitable for the development of collecting activities in Mexico and Central America.

Displaying Mesoamerica in both the United States and the United Kingdom was not a marginal or unimportant phenomenon but rather one that deserves our attention due to its importance in the history of Pre-Columbian archaeology. This is because Britain and America were the places where the first exhibitions on Mesoamerica were produced. *Ancient Mexico* was the first ever exhibition on the Aztecs worldwide. These countries were the birthplace of the first exhibitions in history that attempted to show living Aztecs during the nineteenth century. Cruger Monument was also historically unique since it was the first ever mock-ruin to be associated with Mesoamerica. Young's, Christy's and the British Museum's displays were innovative by suggesting the aesthetic value of Pre-Columbian antiquities. Surely, each nation contributed with specific forms of displaying Mesoamerica. There is also evidence that one show was presented in both Britain and America, although the responses to them were qualitatively different. Therefore, the British-American tradition of displaying Mesoamerica needs to be reassessed in its importance in relation to similar contemporary national traditions including the French, the German, the Danish, the Italian and of course, the Mexican or any other national tradition in Central America. It is noteworthy that early to middle nineteenth-century British and American displays of Mesoamerica appear more complex and sophisticated than those produced in Mexico's National Museum during the same period (Cf. Morales-Moreno 1998). However, as in the case of European traditions, research needs to be carried out on Mexican and Central American private displays, since this part of history has been obscured by investigations into institutional Universal, National and Ethnographic Museums.

By comparing private and institutional displays, we can further detect four internal differences within the 'exhibitionary complex' of Mesoamerica:

First, private displays were more common than institutional exhibits. However, the latter tended to be less ephemeral than the former due to the stability derived from the institutional realm in which they emerged.

Secondly, institutional displays generated a lot of information regarding accessions, registries and bureaucratic procedures because their administrative authorities demanded it. These sources of information, which were preserved thanks to organizational procedures, unfortunately are not explicit about the displays themselves. However, visual materials such as plans and photographs permit us to appreciate the location of the Mesoamerican displays in the museum layout and sometimes to know more about the appearance of the exhibit. Furthermore, since they cover a long period of time, institutional documents offer us the possibility of carrying out a synchronic analysis regarding changes in displaying practices within the same exhibition setting, and particularly, about the changing values to which artefacts were subjected throughout history. Comparatively, information on private exhibits, though sometimes scarce, tends to be richer and more substantial in its content. Written and visual material provides generous data about the exhibition's content, layout, and appearance.

Third, private displays were more innovative and complex than their institutional counterparts. Indeed, private exhibits employed a large variety of display technologies including recreation, reconstructions, and performance, whereas institutional exhibitions often used conventional gallery glass display cases. The sophistication of display strategies allowed private curators to convey sophisticated ideas about complex subjects, such as religion, architectural developments, and socio-political issues. It seems that the reason for this is that private curators enjoyed more freedom in the decision-making processes associated with an exhibit and were more eager to attract visitors for economic gain, factors that doubtless stimulated innovation and creativity. In contrast, curators of institutional museums were more limited by the traditions of their institutions, the authorities of the museums and the organisational culture, which meant that exhibitions had to follow conventional norms that limited innovation possibilities. However, institutional displays excelled in processes of categorisation, typology, and seriation, which served to provide detailed information about the material culture on display.

Private displays produced more advertising than institutional ones. Although the scarcity of advertising may be contradictory to the public advocacy of national organisations, this tendency appears to respond to the very nature of private enterprises. The need of funds made necessary by the requirement to attract visitors meant that private enterprises were proactive in using mass media for publicising the displays. We lack qualitative data to determine whether public displays received more visitors than institutional exhibits. However, considering the information available, it appears that *Ancient Mexico* and the *Aztec Show* were extremely popular whereas the British Museum's pre-Columbian collections struggled, not always gaining the acceptance of the Trustees, but attracting some visitors.



Therefore, private and institutional exhibitions represent two different traditions of displaying that deserve consideration in their own right. These traditions interacted since many collections that once appeared in private displays were eventually incorporated into institutional museums. There is also evidence that press reviews of private displays encouraged institutional museums to acquire or increase their Mesoamerican collections. Yet, there is still a history to write about how these traditions shared display technologies, whether or not representations impacted each other and, if so, how interpretations influenced development. We also need to investigate if there was any kind of technological or conceptual feedback between private/institutional displays and other traditions of the nineteenth century 'exhibitionary complex' (i.e. shopping malls, World's Fairs).

### **7.1.3. Conceptual Traits**

Nineteenth-century British and American displays of Mesoamerica were characterised by five essential conceptual traits:

First, in comparison with previous exhibits, these spectacles represented Mesoamerican artefacts as belonging to the past. This meant that the exhibits deployed a series of visual, textual and spatial display strategies to convey the idea of time and structured the notion of 'ancientness'.

Second, nineteenth-century British and American displays associated their contents with specific geographical locations (Mexico), cultural groups (Aztec, Toltec) and even archaeological sites (e.g., Palenque, Copan). In fact, objects represented, stood for, or illustrated particular aspects of the cultures to which they were thought to belong. These conceptual frameworks persisted in spite of the fact that some Mesoamerican collections were absorbed within the general framework of 'ethnography'.

Third, as in previous centuries, early to middle nineteenth-century British and American displays established links between Mesoamerican and non-Western cultures, including Egyptian and other oriental cultures. However, the stimulus was entirely different from earlier centuries, prior to ca. 1800. Rather than constructing geographically unspecific locations, as the construction of the 'exotic' demands (Mason 1998), 1800s exhibits elaborated on interpretations about cultural analogy and diffusionism.

Fourth, 1800s exhibits were able to articulate complex ideas about Mesoamerican cultures, creating coherent images of them. In particular, they were able to transmit the idea that these societies achieved a degree of cultural complexity. Finally, nineteenth-century British and American displays on Mesoamerica structured some aspects of the notion of 'ancient civilisations'. Articulating the notion of 'ancient civilisation' was partly determined by the production of the exhibits, as we will see in the following section.

## **7.2. PRODUCTION**

Producing displays on Mesoamerica during the nineteenth century in Britain and the United States was a complex endeavour in terms of the processes, the agents, and the contexts involved.

### **7.2.1 Processes**

During the nineteenth century, several processes were carried out for producing a display on Mesoamerica. A first stage involved gathering the contents of the exhibit via different procedures: primary and secondary collecting, loans, making reproductions (copies, direct casts and reconstructions), constructing models or scenery recreations, and producing imagery. Some displays incorporated living human beings through consent, employment and various types of servitude. Mesoamerican objects, monuments and people were not exhibited on their own. They were presented, organised and arranged into exhibition settings, which could comprise simple glass cases, ornamental scenery, complete reconstructions, and theatrical shows. An array of visual, written, spatial, scenery, and performative technologies were put into operation in order to give the exhibit coherence, credibility and appeal.

### **7.2.2. Agents**

Curators/producers were the masterminds of the exhibits and employed their abilities, resources and creativity to design, produce, and put displays into operation. They were responsible for much of the decision-making, planning and execution of the exhibits. They decided on the location, disposition, arrangement and the general layout of objects and monuments in the exhibits. They named, labelled, and ordered items to formulate the narrative of the displays. They designed and put visual and written display technologies into action. They were also in charge of producing the performance of shows of people. They compiled and synthesised information from literature available at the time to produce guidebooks, pamphlets and other written aids. They also designed advertisements and negotiated their inception in the press. It appears that they also provided information to reporters in charge of writing reviews. However, academic literature has not given curators/producers the place that they deserve in the history of museums and archaeology. Their biographies, backgrounds, interests and relationships explain to large degree their productions. Therefore, archaeological research needs to deepen its understanding of these agents and reassess their contribution to the development of archaeological thought.

There is evidence that curators employed other agents for certain aspects of the production processes, for example, to make reproductions and copies. Unfortunately, there is not much

information about these agents and their input into the production process of the displays. Yet, the complexity of the exhibitions suggests that their production was based on the organization of a highly skilled team.

Those who were exhibited in the displays played substantial roles in the exhibiting process: they were subjects of display, performers and guides. Unfortunately, we will never know what the opinion of these individuals was regarding their experiences in the show business and the exhibitions in which they participated.

### **7.2.3. Context**

The production of Mesoamerican exhibits in both Britain and America was not exclusively the product of ambassadorial or consular endeavours (*contra* Hinsley 1993). The phenomenon was more variable and complex since diverse agencies were involved. American and British curators were showmen, entrepreneurs, scholars, businessmen, diplomats, soldiers, artists and architects. All of them had different motives for engaging in such activity, but they all had a common motivation: a genuine interest in producing displays on Mesoamerica to disseminate information about Mesoamerica to their contemporaries.

The production of the 1800s displays on Mesoamerica was not only framed according to a rationale of imperialism or informal imperialism (*contra* Hinsley 1993; Aguirre 2005; Diaz-Andreu 2007). It took place within a range of circumstances: scientific, travelling, business and leisure pursuits. It is difficult to discern the political agendas of these initiatives; therefore scholars need to be careful not to make generalisations on the basis of a few cases, because this only limits our understanding of the complexity of the phenomena of cultural relationships. In fact, contrary to conventional colonialist/imperialist models recently proposed in the literature (e.g. Aguirre 2005), collecting and displaying Mesoamerican antiquities was sometimes supported by the participation of locals, which meant that they together with the curators acted within a framework of ‘symbiotic collaboration’.

## **7.3. REPRESENTATION**

Key points about display representation can be summarised according to three topics: approaches, topics and implications.

### **7.3.1. Approaches**

Early to middle nineteenth-century British and American displays on Mesoamerica confronted a gigantic and complex challenge: representing a culture that was not only geographically,

temporally and culturally distant but also largely unknown to the British and American public. Thus, to bridge this gap, displays put a series of representation strategies into operation that helped to make the unfamiliar familiar. Hence, it was quite understandable, and to some extent obvious, that exhibitions largely represented Mesoamerica through the filters of Western lenses.

However, displays were not a simple reflection of what the British and Americans thought or believed about Pre-Columbian cultures. The exhibitions were ‘archaeological representations’ that tried to approach the past through material culture by means of an interpretative process. Curators were not aware of this epistemological conjecture; but their exhibits were not intentionally misleading or untruthful. Rather, displays were truly products of their era. They represented Mesoamerica according to the knowledge and the values of the times, thus constituting culturally, politically and socially contingent constructs.

Yet the exhibits also responded independently to the interpretation of Mesoamerica, drawing their own explanations, formulating alternative views, and creating new representations which sometimes contradicted ideas that had been previously put forward in scholarly literature. These new interpretations were often the result of examining artefacts as sources of independent data that could complement or debate historical resources, the very quality of archaeological inquiry. One can argue that some items on display ‘resisted’ the interpretation posed upon them by scholars or even curators. Recent theorising in anthropology has coined the term ‘hybridity’ to refer to the creation of new trans-cultural forms (Bhaba 1994). We can argue that displays represented a hybrid representation of Mesoamerica that was based on archaeological data and the information known, digested and analysed by the curators.

### 7.3.2. Topics

The representation of Mesoamerica in early to middle nineteenth-century displays was selective and partial: it was based on the repetition of a set of topics:

*Religion:* According to Diaz-Andreu (2007: 16), this topic guided much archaeological enquiry during the nineteenth century. Displays represented Mesoamerican religion by conveying images of and information about temples, Mesoamerican gods, ritual practices and in particular, human sacrifices. Such an approach reinforced the idea that Mesoamerican Religion was idolatrous, pagan, absurd, and somehow brutal, which contrasted with Modern European Christianity.

*Aesthetics:* Early displays of Mesoamerica often articulated the dichotomy between Art/artefact that served to trace an axis between Western and non-Western artistic capabilities. By the mid-nineteenth century, some displays began to recognise the artistic merit of Pre-Columbian artefacts. Therefore, the aesthetic valuation of Pre-Columbiana commenced in

the nineteenth-century 'exhibitionary complex' instead of within the framework of the 'Primitivist Revolution' (Braun 1993; Williams 1993). Issues of monumentality were not central to the recognition of ancient Mesoamerican art (*contra* Diaz-Andreu 2007: 169) but they were instead articulated in terms of technological considerations.

*Architecture:* Display representations represented some cultural achievements attained by Mesoamerican cultures, including the development of cities and the construction of solid and monumental architecture. Mock ruins and reproductions of large sculptural remains also served to convey the idea of architectural and sculpture monumentality.

*Calendar and Writing Systems:* Reproductions of Mesoamerican sculpture and Pre-Columbian codices served to communicate the idea that Mesoamerican cultures had developed a calendar and a writing system. Writing was a recurrent topic for the representation of Mesoamerica, which was also addressed by presenting originals or copies of Pre-Columbian codices. The decipherment of Pre-Columbian writing became an issue of representation in displays; some argued that it was possible to read Pre-Columbian documents whereas others wondered whether this was possible, and others encouraged academics to pursue this endeavour.

*Society:* Although in a limited fashion, displays also aimed to convey ideas about the ways of government and the political institutions of the people and civilisations that comprised Mesoamerica. They also represented the societies of Mesoamerica by articulating ideas about the characteristics of some of cultures of the various regions. Shows of people were essential for this, since they represented the human scale of the Mesoamerican social fabric.

*People:* By the very act of presenting individuals linked to Mesoamerica, either as representatives, atavisms or successors, exhibits provided a perceived direct experience with Pre-Columbian people and the way that they were thought to live, behave and think. Exhibits also employed living people to portray the abilities, spiritual characteristics and physical attributes of past and present Mesoamerican Indians. Mesoamerican people were not always represented as 'lazy or stupid' (*contra* Diaz-Andreu 2007: 169); rather they were framed as two representations: the 'Noble Indian' and the 'Degenerate Indian'.

### **7.3.3. Implications**

Early to middle nineteenth-century American and British displays homogenised Pre-Columbian cultural diversity by exclusively representing the Nahua and Toltec societies that once inhabited Central Mexico, even though the displays contained material from other cultures, notably that of the Maya. By 'essentialising' Mesoamerica, displays deployed a key practice of Orientalism (Behdad 1996: 11).

The representation of Mesoamerica in nineteenth-century American and British displays almost always functioned as an 'inverse self-image' of Western modern society. Thus, exhibitions operated within the networks of alterity, constructing asymmetrical power relationships between the West/Self and the Rest/Other. However, this axis of difference does not correspond to the conventional dichotomy between civilised Westerners and uncivilised Easterners that has been analysed in anthropological literature (e.g. Barringer 1997; Coombes 1994, 1996; Dias 1983, 1998; Hall 1997c; Hallam & Street 2000b; Kirshenblatt-Gimblett 1991; Rothfelds 1996; Russell 1997, Ucko 2000). The reason for this is that displays represented Mesoamerica as having some traits of the conceptual notion of 'ancient civilisations'. This representation of Mesoamerica and the exhibitions themselves provoked diverse reactions from the viewers.

#### **7.4. INTERPRETATION**

Issues of interpretation, although partial, offer the possibility not only to analyse the public's response to the exhibit but also to assess the efficiency of displays transmitting ideas from producers to viewers.

Public response to 1800s Mesoamerican exhibits was often enthusiastic and people actually engaged with the images and messages conveyed by the displays. In fact, there were different ways of doing so. Some reporters reflected on the exhibits' representations and further disseminated them, which constitutes evidence of the power of displaying practices to persuade audiences of the validity of the producers' points of view. Others elaborated on the ideas conveyed by the exhibitions, proposing new interpretations or fresh ideas. There is also evidence that press reviews did not always agree with the displays' representations and therefore challenged them. This means that exhibits did not only transmit ideas but also encouraged the viewers to produce their interpretations. Those opinions that diverged from or contradicted the exhibit's representations indirectly showed that displays were indeed places for the testing of ideas against hard evidence.

In particular, academic responses to displays on Mesoamerica reflected theoretical, informational and technological advances in both archaeology and anthropology. Scholars engaged in debates and elaborated on ideas that were not conveyed by the exhibits. Therefore, exhibits stimulated scientific development at interpretative and conceptual levels.

Academic and popular audiences responded to both private and institutional displays, which showed that the scholarly and public spheres did not exist in different realms. It remains to be analysed how academic and popular archaeological representations influenced each other during the nineteenth century. It is worth pointing out that responses were never opposed to the displays that represented Mesoamerica as belonging to an ancient past. Nor did anyone deny that Pre-Columbian societies had achieved cultural complexity. Mesoamerica was framed within

the notion of ‘ancient civilisation’ by displaying strategies through a complex process, here termed ‘structuration’.

## 7.5. STRUCTURATION

Diaz-Andreu (2007: 172) recently argued that Latin-American antiquities remained in a difficult position during the 1800s because ‘they did not respond to the Classical or religious canon & therefore could not be integrated into the past of the Western Civilisation’. This assertion is not incorrect, but misses an important point. Early to middle nineteenth-century British and American displays structured some central ideas of the notion of ‘ancient civilisations’ to represent Mesoamerica. However, these exhibitions did not represent Mesoamerica as a Classical (or Western) civilisation, but rather as an ancient *Oriental* civilisation, even though Pre-Columbian cultures did not develop in the conventional geographical and cultural construction of the Orient (Asia).

Framing Mesoamerica within the category of the notion of ‘ancient civilisation’ was a complex process that depended on the articulation of some structural elements of the S-Code presented in Table 3. My research has tested this initial S-Code against factual evidence, i.e. exhibitions. Thus, we can therefore proceed to clarify the S-Code of the notion of ‘ancient civilisation’, which was formulated by the nineteenth century ‘exhibitionary complex’ of Mesoamerica. The results are presented in Table 9.

Taking the information provided by Table 9 into account, it thus appears that the ‘exotic’ was not the dominant framework for interpreting and displaying Mesoamerican cultures by nineteenth-century British and American archaeology (*contra* Diaz-Andreu 2007: 169). Rather, exhibits represented Mesoamerica according to a complex theoretically informed archaeological notion which referred to concepts of ‘ancientness’ and ‘cultural sophistication’. This was done by putting acts of timing and complexity into operation: exhibits articulated specific display strategies to transmit ideas or ‘codes’ which were known to, shared by and meaningful to a community. As a result of this process, archaeological knowledge was transmitted from the producers of the exhibits to their viewers. Thus, regardless of its intrinsically problematic nature, the notion of ‘ancient civilisation’ was useful and relevant for interpreting the Pre-Columbian past in displays because American and British people could understand some of its features by means of a translation into a well-known language code.

Structuring the notion of ‘ancient civilisation’ in the nineteenth-century ‘exhibitionary complex’ of Mesoamerica entailed a series of dichotomies with other notions. Speaking in Semantic terms, the S-Code of the notion of ‘ancient civilisation’ followed R-Code opposition rules in relation to other S-notions, such as that of ‘Primitive’ and ‘Modern Western Civilisation’. Additionally, the notion of ‘ancient civilisation’ was internally divided into Classical and Oriental-Mesoamerican

Civilisations, which also worked through oppositional R-Codes. These Semantic relationships are summarised in the model presented in Figure 53.

Synchronic analysis has shown that the structural elements of the S-Code persisted throughout history, consolidating the conceptual meaning of the ‘ancient civilisation’. However, the traditionalist nature of this notion was coupled with a large degree of flexibility to incorporate new data, new perspectives, interpretative arguments and theoretical underpinnings. Thus, the ‘ancient civilisation’ constituted a prototype, which adapted and manifested itself through different stereotypes. These stereotypes were articulated through a complex written/visual/artefactual/spatial/object-based/performative language which was (is) unique, and perhaps, exclusive to displaying practices, thus constituting the means of configuring what we can call an ‘exhibiting anthropological culture’. The prototype of Mesoamerica within the framework of the ‘ancient civilization’ has persisted up to the present (Appendix IV) and this legacy needs to be examined by scholars concerned with the critical character of archaeology.

Employing the semantic research method, this research provides insight into how exhibitions convey ideas that serve to transmit complex notions from producers to viewers. Since this methodology is supported by a series of conceptual considerations about exhibits, the following section summarises the most important theoretical contributions of this investigation to the study of displays.



Table 9 Clarification of the S-Code of the notion of ‘Ancient Civilisation’ in the Nineteenth-century ‘Exhibitionary Complex’ of Mesoamerica					
P E R I O D I S A T I O N	Acts of Timing	A          C	C  I  V   I    L   I  S  A	Acts of Complexity	I N D E X I N G
	Sharply distinctive eras: Ancient Mexico-Colonial Period- Modern Mexico			Urban Life	
	Rupture: Ancient Mesoamerica separated from Modernity through the dark ages: Colonial Period: Qualification: Mesoamerica=Golden Era. (Modern Mexico= Revival) Remoteness: Geographical distance: Mexico Far Away Country, Foreign, Strange, Incommensurable Remoteness: Temporal Distance The latter reinforced by labelling and categorisation: Mexican Antiquity, Mexican Antiquities, ‘Ancient Race’. Remoteness: Ancient Mesoamerica as the past of European Modernity Deepness by creation of chronology: Toltec, Aztecs Dating: Ancient Mesoamerica before rupture, destruction and cultural discontinuity provoked by Spanish Conquest			Barbaric, Foreign Physical abnormality Polytheism Sexual depravation	
	Contrasting: Mesoamerica Idolatrous and Pagan <i>vs.</i> European Christian Modernity			Cultural complexity defined according to Enlightenment paradigms of progression Determination based on socio-cultural traits Evolutionist: Ambiguity in its position within Ethnography due to chronology and artistic complexity.	
	Revival: recovery of Antiquities, monuments, and living atavisms of ancient cultures still in operation Appropriation by Westerners			Pre-Morgan: Barbaric, Writing, Urbanism Pre-Lubbock: Idolatry Historical Records (Codices) Pre-Spencer: Ancient Race	
	Progressive view of Art: Mesoamerican Monuments Origins of the ‘Chain of Art’				
	Great antiquity comparable to Egyptian due to diffusionist theories and compact chronology before the 1860s				
	Re-signification: Mesoamerica grouped with the Ancient Civilizations of Europe: analogy, diffusionism common origin Incorporated into ‘Chain of Art’.				
T R A N S F O R M A T I O N	Decay: Mock- Ruin, Depictions of Archaeological ruins	E       T	S   A   T   I   O   N	Alterity: Ancient Mexico (Mesoamerica) <i>vs.</i> Modern Mexico  Mesoamerican Civilization <i>vs.</i> Classical Antiquity  Mesoamerican Civilisation <i>vs.</i> European Modernity  Paradoxes: The Past of Others as Civilised?. Art in Other Cultures?	M I R R O W I N G
	Mesoamerica civilised <i>vs.</i> Other uncivilised Others			Oriental Golden Past: dead, long-gone, neglected, detached from the present= Ruins, Degenerate Indians. Monumental: Architecture and Sculpture Colossal monstrosities Despotism Paganism Fallen-Civilization Comparable with other Oriental civilisations: analogy and diffusionism	
	Barbaric: due to religion and sacrificial practices			Modern Interlopers:  Noble Indian: Perfect worker for New European Expansionism, Translator of Pre-Columbian culture to Europeans.  Degenerate Indian: atavism freaks, fantastic, unfit to analyse their own cultural, intellectual and physical limitations	O R I E N T A L I S A T I O N
	Conflicting relationship with Evolutionist Theory due to ancientness and cultural sophistication: ambiguous and problematic integration in Ethnographic displays.  Archaeological Fantasies: the Past alive in the Present.				
	M A P P I N G			Meta-narrative of Progress: archaic civilisation: writing, calendar systems, religion, art, despotism  Mesoamerica Dichotomy with Western Classical Past and Western Modernity	

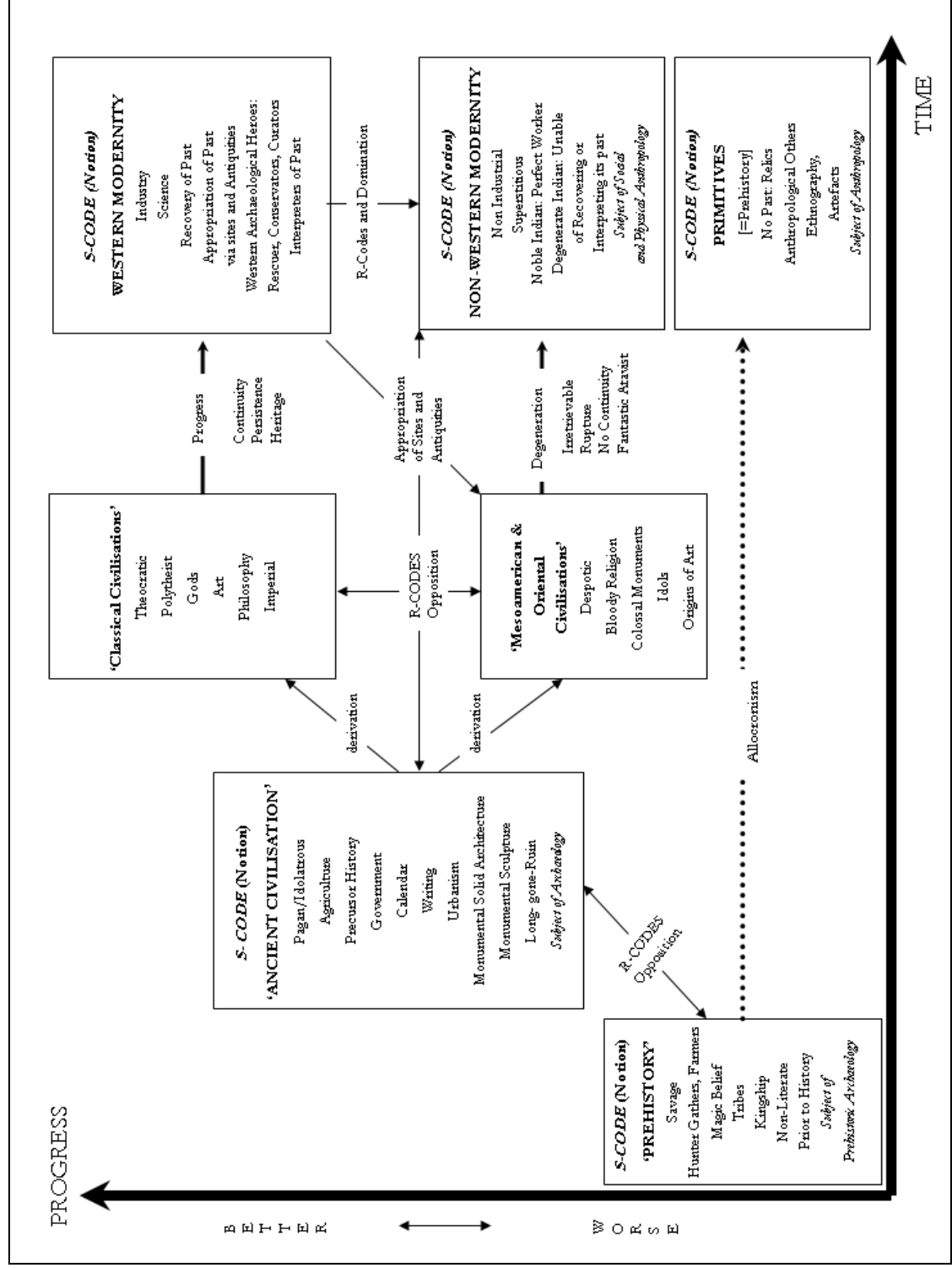


Figure 53. Structural Components and Relationships of the Notion of 'Ancient Civilisation' within the Nineteenth-century Meta-narrative of Progress & Time.

## 7.6. THEORETICAL CONTRIBUTIONS

Victorian displays have been stereotyped as ‘dusty and gloomy vaults in which objects identified by yellowed curling labels were crowded in dimly lit cabinets, which T. Adorno (1967) has characterised as ‘the family sepulchres’ (in Shelton 1994: 11). Yet in the nineteenth century, the British and American ‘exhibitionary complex’ of Mesoamerica was rich, diversified, innovative, and *avant garde*, even for our contemporary eyes.

These exhibitions actively formulated and transmitted archaeological knowledge of Mesoamerica in nineteenth-century Britain and the United States. They produced images and messages about Mesoamerican cultures that were not found in popular and academic literature of the time. This means that exhibitions effectively played an active role in the interpretative processes of nineteenth century Mesoamerican archaeology and anthropology. Displays constituted three-dimensional interpretations and arguments about the Pre-Columbian past in their own right. Information from exhibitions was instrumental in the debate of academic circles and was subject to public scrutiny.

Exhibitions presented a great diversity of interpretations over time because they showed the development of archaeological and anthropological practice in Mexico and Central America. They incorporated material from new archaeological sites and were receptive to the new studies and ideas about Mesoamerican cultures. Furthermore, exhibitions reflected the evolution of archaeological and anthropological theoretical models during the nineteenth century.

Exhibitions of Mesoamerica express the different theoretical frameworks that arose during the nineteenth century. By participating in contemporary debates, as well as by presenting material evidence and particular arrangements, they showed the historical tensions between different theoretical models, exposing their weaknesses and strengths. In most cases, exhibitions tried to reinforce the validity of the theories that lay behind them. However, in some cases, the confrontation of archaeological or anthropological evidence on display defied the interpretations and the theoretical frameworks. In this sense, exhibitions constituted a special manifestation of archaeological practice in which interpretations and theoretical models were “tested” once they were confronted with material evidence. Hence, displays constitute an archaeological network for reasoning, comprehending and explaining the past. They are complex manifestations of the intellectual interpretative process of archaeology.

Displays structured the complex notion of ‘ancient civilisations’ through the articulation of a complex written/visual/spatial/performativelanguage ‘code’. This code allowed producers to employ displays transmitting ideas to the viewers. Hence, exhibitions contributed to the formulation and dissemination of archaeological notions and conceptualisations that served to constitute the archaeological knowledge of the past.

Taking the above information into account, it is clear that analysis of historic exhibitions offers a rich academic potential that has not yet been fully explored. Exhibitions are an alternative path to the analysis of the history of archaeology and anthropology. On one hand, their study uncovers the final products of the exhibition: the three-dimensional interpretation, its content and implicit messages. A chronological dimension reveals the development of these interpretations and their interaction with wider political, economical and cultural settings. On the other hand, the critical analysis of displays uncovers the theoretical framework that lies behind the ideas, the process of their creation, how these interpretations were structured according to specific models of thought, and how these theories and the interpretations *were materialised* in displays. In this sense, exhibitions could be seen as a critical space for the historical interaction of theory, assumptions, interpretation and material culture. Their analysis, therefore, must be considered increasingly important by archaeologists engaged in the exercise of reflection.

## **7.7. WAYS FORWARD**

In the previous sections, I have already posed some topics for investigation. However, I would like to mention three promising research agendas for the future.

Investigation of British and Mesoamerican exhibitions needs to extend to the late nineteenth century and twentieth century to explore the idea that these exhibitions may reflect a particular culture in displaying Pre-Columbian cultures and history. This research will surely shed light on the manner in which Mesoamerica is represented today and how it needs to be represented in future by addressing new topics or problems.

British and American traditions of displaying Mesoamerica need to be compared with other national traditions, particularly the French, German and Mexican, since scholars from all these countries have been central to the development of Mesoamerican archaeology. This will expand our knowledge of the nineteenth and twentieth century ‘exhibitionary complex’ of Mesoamerica on a wider, if not more global, scale. Furthermore, it will add more variables to the formula. For example, France did establish an imperial relationship with Mexico during the 1860s and according to Edison (1999), such a relationship continued throughout the rest of the century in the form of ‘informal imperialism’, a phenomenon that affected some collecting and displaying practices of Mesoamerican material culture. We also need to compare European displays with those produced by Mexicans during the nineteenth century both in the National Museum and in World Fairs which, according to some scholars (Tenorio-Trillo 1996, Morales-Moreno 1998), served to articulate nationalistic claims. Such a global scale of the Mesoamerican ‘exhibitionary complex’ may also serve as the basis to explore whether some display technologies were transmitted or shared by curators from different countries. Furthermore, it could shed light on

how the articulation of Mesoamerica as an ‘ancient civilisation’ might have been produced under conditions of different, and even contradictory, political agendas.

Displays on Mesoamerica from different periods also need to be compared with other forms of archaeological representation including films, popular literature, children’s books, television programmes and computer media. This research might serve to assess new representation strategies and to compare the ideas conveyed by different media.

The nineteenth-century ‘exhibitionary complex’ of displaying Mesoamerica needs to be compared with contemporary displays devoted to ancient civilisations, notably those which have been systematically studied elsewhere (Bohrer 1998; Moser 2006). This investigation might serve to assess whether the representation of other archaeological cultures fitted the S-Code of the notion of ‘ancient civilisation’ presented in this chapter. Furthermore, this research might be useful in evaluating the theoretical and methodological underpinnings employed in my own research. It is clear that we need more and better models to understand the complex dynamics of production, representation, interpretation and structuration that are used in exhibitions, an investigation that, as explained before, might benefit the formulation of present exhibits.

A final note of self-criticism must be added here. My research fails to give a voice to the ‘Other’. Nineteenth century narratives of those who lived in Mexico and Central America are missing and as a consequence, the history of the British representation of Mesoamerica of that period appears to be uni-directional and uncontested when this might not have been the case. Future research needs to correct this failure, enriching the scope of the analysis in a substantial way.

## Appendix I

### A Historical Narrative of Pre-1800s practices of collecting and displaying Mesoamerican Objects in Britain

During the 1500s, the English mathematician, astronomer, geographer and, royal advisor, Dr. John Dee, (1523-1608) acquired an Aztec obsidian mirror (Figure 54), which has passed into history under the names of the 'Devil's Looking Glass' or 'Dee's Speculum' (Bray 1993: 206; Wooller 2002: 155). This article was presumably obtained in France (Feest 1985: 240). Seventeenth-century documentation affirms that Dee employed it to 'call the spirits' during his well-publicized occultist activities (Calder 1952: 11). Studies based on historiography have revisited Dr. Dee's reputation as a sorcerer, by contextualising his alchemist, cabalist and spiritualist activities within the paradigms of sixteenth-century science (Calder 1952: 11; Wooller 2002). Taking into account such data, it can be argued that the speculum's denomination as the 'the Devil's Looking Glass' was not original, but rather a result of Dee's later reputation as a magician (Calder 1952: 11).

Unfortunately, no data exist about the manner in which 'Dee's Speculum' was displayed or employed during the sixteenth century. The same applies to its passing throughout the 1700s, when it belonged to the private collections of a number of British aristocrats (Feest 1993: 3). Subsidiary evidence only indicates that in 1770, the politician, writer, architect and antiquarian H. Walpole, 4<sup>th</sup> Earl of Orford (1771-1797) owned the object until his death (Tait 1967: 119-221; Langford 2005).

From the sixteenth to the eighteenth century 'Dee's Speculum' was never recognised as an Aztec artefact. In fact, according to Feest (1993: 3), for a long period of time it was mistakenly identified as Chinese. However, the major significance of this artefact does not rely on its association with the 'Orient', but rather on the conceptual transfiguration that it experience during its history. For being attached to a silk cover, the obsidian mirror was incorporated into the religious notions of the Western world, a process that transformed its

Figure 54. *Dee's Speculum*, an obsidian mirror collected in  
sixteenth century Britain  
(Courtesy of the British Museum Archives)

original significance.

This type of transfigurations not only took place in sixteenth-century Britain, since at the same period of time German artificers incorporated an Aztec mask within a niche made of a collage of materials, in order to form an 'orientalised figure' (Figure 55) (Keen 1984: plate 27).

It seems very paradoxical that 'Dee's Speculum' never aroused suspicions about its cultural affiliation for it was precisely during the early sixteenth century when many Spanish chronicles about the Conquest of the New World were translated into English (Keen 1984: 178-179). Many texts included certainly mentioned the use of obsidian mirrors in Aztec society. Furthermore, they included introductory studies by their translators, which helped not only to disseminate interpretations of this culture, and particularly one of its most famous rulers (i.e. Moctezuma II), but also, by describing the richness of the local resources and stressing in the

potential of the lands for colonisation, these publications significantly contributed to a vogue for British exploration and expansion to the Americas

Figure 55. Aztec mask in an European  
niche forming an 'orientalised figure'  
circa 1720  
(From Honour 1975: 168)

(Keen 1984: 178). This trend culminated with the publication of the *English-American: His Travail by Sea and Land* (1648) by Thomas Gage, one of the few Britons who travelled through parts of Mesoamerica during 1625 (Bernal 1980: 46), which tried to convince the British monarchy to conquer New Mexico (Newton 2004: x-xii).

In fact, these propagandist materials and Dee's geographical writings greatly influenced the work of R. Hakluyt (1553-1666), a British diplomat who is principally remembered for his efforts in promoting and supporting the settlement of North America by the English (Hakluyt 1582; 1598-1600; Keen 1984: 179; Calder 1952: 11). However, Hakluyt also deserves recognition for his collecting activities, particularly in relation to Mesoamerica. For it is known that in the 1580s he acquired the Codex Mendoza from the royal cosmographer A. Thervet (Berdan 1997). This early sixteenth-century pictographic document, which follows the Prehispanic tradition of textual and visual recording of the Nahua cultures of Central Mexico (Noguez 2002: 157), afterwards became the property of the famous travel-writer Samuel Purchas (1575- 1626), who partially published it in his *Pilgrims* (Purchas 1625: 413)

It is widely recognised that the dissemination of the images of the Codex Mendoza within the 1600s European intellectual circles awakened interest in Aztec writing, particularly in comparison with Egyptian hieroglyphics (i.e. Kircher 1652: 28-36). However, none have

hitherto noted that this intercultural relationship was also made evident through the categorisation of another Pre-Columbian document –namely the Codex Laud–, which belonged to the *Liber hieroglyphicorum Aegyptiorum* of the Bodleian Library at this very time (Glass 1975: 152).

It was precisely at the Bodleian Library where the Codex Mendoza and three other Pre-Columbian pictographic documents (the Bodley Codex, Selden Codex and the Selden Roll) were finally gathered during the seventeenth century, after having passed through the hands of the diplomat and linguist T. Bodley (1545-1613) and of the jurist and orientalist J. Selden (1584-1654), respectively (Σ-Polh: 2008: 1). It is not yet known whether or not these documents were originally displayed in the cabinets of these scholars, or if they were merely incorporated into their private libraries. In any case, it is very likely that they were shown to very limited audiences. No major changes in reception appeared to have operated after these Codices passed into the property of the Bodleian Library, for this institution has traditionally maintained a policy that restricts access to scholarly-orientated readers.

The mid-eighteenth century witnessed the formation of a rather larger object-based Pre-Columbian collection in Britain. According to King (1994: 234-236), among the 71,000 items that formed the collection of the diplomat and naturalist H. Sloane (1660-1753), there were at least five Mesoamerican antiquities. These consisted of a painted gourd, a penis-shaped artefact, a pot, an axe that appeared in the catalogue as an ‘Indian hatchet’, and a dark green stone pendant described as ‘an Egyptian head of the Sun in Basalt’ (King 1994: 234-236). The categorisation of the last two cases offers further evidence from the sixteenth- to the eighteenth-century, British collectors did not always recognise Aztec material culture as such.

A rather opposite instance can be traced to the 1738 annual meeting of the Society of Antiquaries in London, when a Peruvian (Chimu) vessel was exhibited under the name of ‘Moctezuma’s Cup’ (Honour 1975: 166). The interest aroused by it can be judged by the fact that a drawing of it was reproduced in the Society’s minute book (Figure 56). Paradoxically, the rather basic and distorted depiction of the vessel appears to reflect that the draftsman did not appreciate the aesthetic values of the object, a view that was made textually explicit by a marginal comment stating that it was ‘very mean’ (Honour 1975: 166).

Figure 56. Lord Orford’s *Moctezuma’s Cup* drawn in the 1738 minute of the Society of Antiquaries of London (From Honour 1975: 167)

With its foundation in 1753, the British Museum –the first national publicly funded museum of the United Kingdom– acquired the Mexican antiquities that had originally belonged to Sloane’s



collection. This step marked not only the integration of Mesoamerican object-based collections into an institutional realm, but also an important transformation regarding their reception. This operated from 1759 onwards, when the British Museum officially opened to the public ‘via a system of guided visits’ (Moser 2006: 34). During these early years, this institution was subject to tensions between those who saw it as a ‘research institution and those who wanted to facilitate greater public access to the collections’, ‘with the government and the media criticizing the museum’s lack of concern for making the collections as accessible as possible’ (Moser 2006: 34). However, there is no doubt that after their incorporation into a public museum, Mesoamerican artefacts began to be exposed to much larger audiences than ever before in British history.

Furthermore, it appears that during the first decade of its life, the British Museum enhanced its collection of Mexican antiquities, particularly with sculptures. By 1762, these were part of the series of ‘American idols’ that, according to King (1994: 231), were exhibited in the Department of Artificial Curiosities, along with a wide range of materials that came from a number of non-Western locations, which were later associated with the ethnographic realm. It is not clear yet whether other Mexican antiquities were physically associated with the Egyptian collections at the exhibition galleries of the British Museum. However, the printed guide of that year did suggest their formal similarities (King 1994: 231).

According to Honour (1975: 166), in 1765 Lord Andrew Archer (1736-1778), owner of ‘Moctezuma’s Cup’, exhibited it again at the Society of Antiquaries. This presentation was coupled with the display of a watercolour of the front, back and side-view of the object, made by one of the founders of the Royal Academy: Paul Sandby (1731-1809) (Figure 57). The legend of this picture not only described the weight and material of the artefact –5.2 pounds of gold–, but it also briefly exposed details of its collecting history: it stated that the Earl of Orford purchased the vessel from Spanish nobles, when the English fleet lay at the harbour of Cadiz. Such an origin not only seems plausible according to historical data, but it also indicates that such a transaction took place at the beginnings of the seventeenth century (Honour 1975: 166-167).

Figure 57. ‘Moctezuma’s Cup’ by  
Sandby circa 1765  
(From Honour 1975: 167)

It is noteworthy that during that meeting the renowned historian William Robertson (1721-1793) examined 'Moctezuma's Cup', testifying that 'it was too rude for Spanish workmanship' (Honour 1975: 166-167). This statement suggests not only that there was already a debate regarding the object's origin, but also that its aesthetic value remained unappreciated by British scholars. Nevertheless, by stating that the object's 'features were very gross, but represented with some degree of art', it seems that Robertson had a more positive opinion regarding the artistic value of the object. Such an ambiguous evaluation of the artefact can only be explained by considering the historical significance and the implications of the encounter of Robertson with 'Moctezuma's Cup', both of them aspects that have not been hitherto properly analysed in normative histories of Mesoamerican archaeology.

Indeed, literature of 'Moctezuma's Cup' (Honour 1975: 166-167) has failed to recognise its historical significance for the development of Pre-Columbian archaeology: its rather negative aesthetic evaluation at the Society of Antiquaries preceded the publication of Robertson's most important contribution to the study of Mexican antiquity: *The History of America* (1777), a work that 'marked the climax of Enlightenment writing on the Aztecs due to its careful scholarship and its critical spirit' (Keen 1973: 275). Therefore, it seems plausible that the examination of 'Moctezuma's Cup' might have stimulated Robertson's scholarly enquiry about the Pre-Columbian world. Moreover, this meeting may have been the only occasion on which the historian actually entered into direct contact with Mesoamerican material culture, for it is known that his *History* basically resulted from the revision of a vast number of literary resources and third-party descriptions of the Pre-Columbian collections exhibited at the time in Spain (Keen 1973: 275).

In relation to the implications of such a display, it is important to note that Robertson's opinion about the appearance of 'Moctezuma's Cup' anticipated the general evaluation of the cultural development of the Aztecs that was exposed by his writings. Indeed, the *History of America* was clearly influenced by the work of C. du Pauw (1768), who on the basis of determinist climatic theories, proposed that the New World was inferior to Europe both in natural and cultural terms. However, Robertson's innovation consisted of developing a theory of social evolution, in which progress was measured according to three stages: savagery, barbarism and civilisation. The incorporation of the Aztecs into this model though proved difficult. On the one hand, by examining their industry, the number and layout of Pre-Columbian cities, their progress in astronomical and chronological sciences, and their *artistic skills*, Robertson (I: 269, 281-283, my emphasis) concluded the Mexica culture belonged to higher levels of barbarism towards a transition to civilisation. On the other hand, by analysing the development of their agriculture, their constant state of war, the lack of iron, and the *embryonic development of their arts*, the historian stated that Aztecs had achieved little progress beyond savage tribes (Robertson 1777: 274-303). Indeed, such views were at the core of Robertson's evaluation of Moctezuma's cup. In fact,

Robertson's assessment on this artefact echoed his views regarding the manifestations of Aztec art, which was described as a series of 'uncouth representations of common objects, or very coarse images of human and some other forms destitute of grace and property' (Robertson 1777: 274). Therefore, one can argue that, at this early stage, the display of Pre-Columbian artefacts had an influence on the shaping of general interpretations of Mesoamerican cultures and, particularly on the value-laden evaluation of the Pre-Columbian arts. This is especially relevant in the case of Robertson's work. For being highly influential in late eighteenth century and early nineteenth century British and American scholarly circles, the *History of America* helped to renew scepticism about the complexity of Aztec culture, the splendour of Moctezuma's court and the magnificence of Pre-Columbiana. Moreover, it might be the case that this *History* had also an impact on the collecting culture of the United Kingdom and the recently emancipated United States, since there is no evidence of the formation of Pre-Columbian collections in any of these countries during the late eighteenth century.

## Appendix II

### British Museum's Accessions of Mesoamerican Objects (1753-1876)

<b>Table 10</b> <b>British Museum's Accessions of Mesoamerican Objects (1753-1876)</b>			
Year	Type of Collection (Origin)	Collector/Donator	Reference
1753	Five Pre Columbian artefacts: Dark Green Stone Pendant, an 'Egyptian head of the sun in basalt'	Bequest by H. Sloane (1660-1753), founder of the BM.	BMR: 518 King 1994:234-235
1787	A Cup and a Dagger that had supposedly belonged to Moctezuma	Mr. Hylton, Member of the Society of Antiquaries,	BMR 1785-1878:6
1821	'Earthen images and a jar' (presumably from Sacrificios Island, Veracruz, Mexico)	Donated by G. A Prinsep, Member of the Asiatic Society.	BMR: 1757-1878: 9 Bernal 1980: 132
1825	At least 54 artefacts from Bullock's collection, including those identified today as the Xuihcoatl, Chalchiticue, Xochipilli, Quatzalcoatl, and Obsidian Mirror and Terracota vessels and figurines (Mexico)	Purchased from Profr. William Buckland –Dean of Westminster, professor of Geology at Oxford, and President of the Geological Society –.	BMR 1754-1857:2937, 2939 BMCD 1825: 2058, 2077, 2082 MacEwan 1994: 11, 69-73 Medina-González 1999: 69-70
1827	Small Antiquities (Mexico)	D. Barclay	BMR 1757-1878:14
1830	Several antiquities (Mexico)	Presented by Rev. W.V. Hennah	BMR: 9 BMR 1757-1878: 14
1830	An Antiquity (Mexico)	?	BMR 1754-1878: 3235
1833	Two urns (Mexico)	Purchased for £2.2	BMA 1754-1857: 3630
1835	A Flint Idol (Honduras Bay)	Donated by Mr. Calvert, Museum of Leiden, Netherlands.	BMR: 15 BMR 1757-1878: 18
1842	25 Figurines and a Vase (Mexico: Huasteca and Panuco)	Donated by Capt. J. Vetch (1780-1869), Captain of Royal Engineers, who lived in Mexico during the 1820's and 1830's.	BMR 1757-1878: 18 DNB 1885-1900:58: 292-293
1843	Terracota ornaments, a bone pin with engravings, two cylindrical vases, three vases with designs. (Mexico: Sacrificios Island, Veracruz).	Excavated by Capt. E. Nepean (?-1864) and purchased for £280 at Hamilton Rooms. (Inventory: Anon 1843: DNB 1855-1900: 58: 292-293)	BMR 1757-1878: 71 BMED 1843: 6334, 1849: 1564, Marshall 1823-1830
1843	Antiquities (Mexico)	Purchase at Johnson Sale (Along with Egyptian Antiquities)	BMED 1754-1857
1844	Terracota Figure (Mexico)	Purchase at Sotheby's sale.	BMR 1757-1878: 73
1845	Three Antiquities. (Mexico)	Purchased at Rhode's sale	BMA 1754-1857: 6755 BMR 1757-1878: 77-79
1846	Gold Mexican Idol (British Honduras)	Donated by Cuventon	BMR 1757-1878: 86
1846	Vase (Cholula, Mexico)	Donated by Lucas Alamán, Ex Minister of Foreign Affairs of Mexico	BMR:71. Bernal 1980: 132

1846	Two Female Figures and Ornament of a headdress (Mexico)	Transferred from Natural History Department, Donated by Mr. Clark, Seething Lane	BMR 1757-1878: 74
1849	Sculptures and Figurines (Mexico)	From Udle Collection at Frankfurt Museum	BMA 1754-1857: 5579
1849	Various Objects (Oaxaca, Mexico)	J. Wetherell from Sevilla, Spain (Inventory: Wetherall 1842)	BMR 1757-1878: 97-101 BMED 1849: 1557, 5728, 5730 MacEwan 1994:61-65
1849	Sculpture of Rattle Snake and A seated figure of Mictlantecuhli (Mexico)	?	MacEwan 1994:69,75
1850	Terracota Vases (Mexico)	Purchased from W. Edwards.	BMR 1757-1878: 105
1851	Alabaster Vase (Mexico: Sacrificios Island)	Presented by Liet. Thomas Forrest	BMR 1757-1878: 130-131 MacEwan 1994: 32
1854	Squatting Figure (Mexico)	Presented by William Webster and Mr. Stokes	BMR 1757-1878: 136
1855	Various artefacts (Mexico: Palenque)	Purchased from Charles Young for £550	BMR 1757-1878: 192 BMA 1754-1857: 8824, 8830, 8837
1855	Female Figure (Fake?) (Mexico)	Exchanged with Amsterdam Museum	BMR 1757-1878: 192
1856	Terracota Figures (Guatemala)	Donated by Gould	BMR 1757-1878: 201
1856	Antiquities (Mexico), including a Pottery incense burner (Oaxaca, Mexico) & a Jade eagle-warrior (Mexico)	Donated by Lady Webster	BMR 1-14-16 MacEwan 1994:66, 74
1856	Antiquities (Mexico)	Presented by R. Cowrt Louge	BMR 4-22
1856	Head figures, figures, Model of Temple. Sellos. Incense Burners, Stone-Figure, Jade pendants , a Drum (Mexico)	Presented by Charles Ashbunham	BMR 1-142, 964-22-142,
1856	Antiquities (Honduras: Peten & Corozal).	Presented by W. Jterenfon Esq. Super Intendant of British Honduras	BMR 57-4-25 2-3, 3-6, 24. 8-11
1856	Antiquities (Mexico: Chiapas & Yucatan).	Donated by F. O'Connor	BMR 28-37
1857	Antiquities (Guatemala & Belize)	Donated by W. Stevenson, Superintendent of British Honduras	BMR 1757-1878: 207-211
1857	Antique (Mexico)	Donated by I. Young from Birmingham.	BMR 1757-1878:216
1859	Antiquities and Musical Instruments from burial (Mexico)	Donated by R. de Silva	BMR 59-11-11-10
1862	Pottery Honduras	Purchased from William Bollaert	BMR 62 7-9, 32, 33
1863	Jade object .	Purchased from William Warcham	BMR 63 .4-17 1,1
1863	Antiquities	Purchased from William Baker (Coventry Street, London)	BMR 69 5-2-1
1864	Antiquities (Guatemala:Peten)	Donated by J. R. Longdem	BMR 64-6-2611
1864	Metate with Glyphs & Yugos	Osbeot Salvin	BMR 81, 11-11-10, 9-14-

	(Honduras: Copan)		14
1864	Antiquities (Mexico & Central America)	Presented by John Mitcheron	BMR 74, 12-11-1
1864	Bone and Stone Antiquities (Teotihuacan, Mexico)	From Glennie Collection	BMR 351, 351 BMR 393- 353 BMR 402-404 BMR 398
1864	Antiquities (Palenque, Mexico)	From Doyle Collection	BMR 409-419, 477 BMR 357-358
1864	Antiquities (Mexico)	Donated by C.Young	BMR 446
1865 - 1870	Antiquities (exhumed from Mexico and Central America)	Donation of William Blackmore, originally purchased from Squier and Davis Collection (New York USA)	BMDC 08.06.1982
1865	Antiquities (Mexico)	Purchased from Farris, Oxford Street, London. Presumably from Humboldt's collection	BMR 65. 6-10-1,3,4,8,9
1866	Antiquities (Mexico)	Purchased from Mr. Farris	BMR 3562
1866	Antiquities (Mexico)	Purchased from Adams	BMR 3563
1868	Lance head (Mexico)	Donated by John Evans	CA -1,28
1868	Antiquities (Guatemala)	Donated by R. Gay	BMR 2850
1868	Antiquities (Mexico)	Donated by John Evans	BMR 4856
1868	Human head in green stone (Mexico)	Purchased from M. Schmidt (Paris, France)	BMR 4907
1868	Antiquities (Mexico)	Purchased from Culler	
1869	Antiquities (Mexico)	Purchased from Fritz Hahn Collection	BMR 5225
1869	Jade (Mexico)	Purchased from Hahn Collection (Hannover, Germany)	BMR 5259
1869	Head (Mexico)	Purchased from Hahn Collection (Hannover, Germany)	BMR 5285
1869	Mezcala Mask (Mexico)	Presented by W. Bragge Shiff	BMR 5487
1869	Antiquities (Mexico)	?	
1870	Atlatl (Mexico)	Purchased from Kleen Collection (Dresden Germany)	BMR 5256
1871	Mosquito Antiquities (Honduras)	Presented by Wickam Sq	BMR7186-7119
1871	Arrow Heads (Oaxaca, Mexico)	Presented by F. Charles Worth	BMR 7201
1871	Jades (Xochicalco, Mexico)	?	BMR 7202/7203
1871	Antiquities (Tuxtla & Amoltepec, Mexico)	Presented by Boucart	BMR 7481,7482-7501
1872	Collection of Jades, Stone Antiquities, Lites, Ceramics (include. Maya Vase) (Tikal, Rabinal, Esquintla, Quiche, Guatemala; Copan, Honduras; Chiapas de Indios, Ocozingo, Tehuantepec, Veracruz, Tabasco, Cholula, Mexico)	Donated by Brasseur Bourbourg	BMR 8377-8398 BMR 8339-8465 BMR 8436-8412 1B. 2/998
1872	11 Antiquities (Teplestastoc, Mexico)	From Ude Collection (Berlin, Germany)	BMR 8618

1872	Fragments of Objects (Mexico)	From Ude Collection (Berlin, Germany)	BMR 8679-8622
1872	Mask made of Green Aventine (Mexico)	Purchased from Schilling (Hamburg, Germany)	BMR 8678
1872	Antiquities (Veracruz, Oaxaca, Puebla, Mexico)	Donated by Boucard	BMR 8982-8985
1873	Antiquities (Escuintla Guatemala)	Donated by Edwin Corbert	BMR 8779-8790
1873	Antiquities (Copan, Honduras)	Purchased from Cutter (London)	BMR 8797
1873	Terracotta Figures, arrow-heads (Palenque, Mexico; Peten, Guatemala; British Honduras)	?	BMR 1-9
1874	Antiquities (Guatemala)	Donated by Edwim Corbert	BMR 9039-9036
1874	Amulet (Mexico)	Purchased from Schilling (Hamburg, Germany)	BMR 9042
1874	Antiquities (Guatemala)	?	BMR 9047-9049
1874	Amulet (Mexico)	Donated W. Carroter	BMR 9053
1874	Obsidian bezote (Mexico)	Purchased from Schilling (Hamburg, Germany)	BMR 9112-9115
1875	Antiquities (Honduras)	Donated by Emily Boyd	BMR 9137
1875	Collection of Jade Pendants and Bezotes (Mexico)	Purchased from J. Simpson	BMR 9434-9469
1875	Maya mask in green stone (Honduras)	Purchased from Tappenden (Sutton Court, United Kingdom)	BMR 9599
1876	Antiquities (British Honduras)	Donated Charles Hamson	BMR 9678 BMR 9679
1876	Greenstone Amulet (Mexico)	Purchased from Hint & Riskill	BMR 9685
1876	Knife (British Honduras)	Donated by Capt. Mulforth Cambell	BMR 9748
1876	Chalchihuitl & Double head serpent of stone	Purchased from Bruce Wright	BMR 9868-9869
1876	Green-Stone Figure (Mexico)	Donated by Ferguson Esq	BMR 9912
1876	Head of Stone	Purchased in Munich	BMR 9923

## Appendix III

### A review of the debate regarding the urban, architecture and social complexity of Mesoamerican cultures from mid-1500s to early-1800s

The origins regarding the urban, architectural and social complexity of Mesoamerican societies can be traced to the sixteenth century. Indeed, Spanish conquerors often expressed marvel, and even, admiration, at the sight of Pre-Columbian cities and their buildings. A paradigmatic example of this was Cortes' description of Tenochtitlán, in which emotion overcame his usual objective and serene tone:

Porque para dar cuenta [...] de la grandeza, extrañas y maravillosas cosas de esta gran ciudad de Temixtitlan: [...] tiene cuatro entradas, todas de calzada hechas a mano [...] es tan grande como Sevilla y Cordova ... tiene muchas plazas, donde hay continuo Mercado. Hay [...] muchas mezquitas o casas de sus ídolos de muy hermosos edificios (Cortes 1993: 61-63).

By mentioning the presence of 'mezquitas', 'calzadas', 'edificios', 'mercados' and 'plazas', Cortés implicitly recognized the complexity of Aztec urbanism and architecture. Moreover, he (1993: 92) was the first to employ the expression 'cal i canto' to denote that Mesoamerican architecture was made of solid materials (Levin-Rojo 2001: 44, n. 20). Similar interpretations continued to be posed by sixteenth-, seventeenth- and- eighteenth century chronicles, cartographic registries, official documents, personal letters, legal testimonies, historical studies and imagery, which invariably represented Tenochtitlán as a large and densely populated city, composed of complex architecture built on solid materials, and organised on the basis of advanced urban infrastructure (Cfr. Levin-Rojo 2001: 44, n.20, Keen 1973: 75-321). In fact, as Keen (1973: 80) has rightly pointed out, by recreating a vivid image of the splendour of Tenochtitlán, European authors greatly contributed to the formulation of an image of a refined and complex Pre-Columbian society, which persisted from the 1500's to the 1700's.

Western thought has historically established a relationship between the notions of 'city' and 'civilisation' through the idea of civility (see Chapter 2). Interestingly enough, this symbolic connection was also established by sixteenth, seventeenth and eighteenth Century literature about Mesoamerica. For instance, describing 'la ciudad de Cempoalla', Cortés (1993: 32) referred to its 'honrados ciudadanos'. Taking into account this and other primary sources, Levin-Rojo (2001: 44-46) has also proved that Spanish conquerors 'admired most of what they saw among the natives of New Spain because they saw their dealings and cultural achievements [...] as a sign of *civilisation*, in the Roman-derived sense of a civic oriented community life'. Proof that this idea was accepted among sixteenth century Old World notables, can be found in Martyr de Algueira's *Decades* ([1520], quoted in Levin-Rojo 2001:41]), which explained that



Cortés' envoys brought 'numerous and magnificent presents for the King [of Spain] from Coloacana, Olloa and Cozumela where [...] people live in a *civilized* manner, under the rule of law'.

During the following two centuries, many European scholars continued to elaborate on the notion of Pre-Columbian 'civility' in order to emphasise the Mesoamerican social sophistication. However, they often added to this equation ideas related to social organization. For Joseph Acosta (1520-1600) *Historia Natural y Moral de las Indias* ([1598] 1940: 251) affirmed that the inhabitants of Tenochtitlán 'no eran gente bruta ni bestial', since they 'vivían en su ley'. The seventeenth century historian Torquemada ([1615] 1943: 243) actually defined the notion of city not only in terms of the congregation of large quantities of peoples, but also according to the peaceful and amicable relationship amongst their inhabitants. Furthermore, by describing Tenochtitlán, his *Monarchia Indiana* (1943: 295) also established the political dimension of urbanism, by stating that this city was organised through a governmental system:

Confieso, que así verdad que esta Ciudad de México estaba repartida en quatro barrios principales y cada uno tiene varios menores [...] como en particular tienen sus mandones y gente, que los tiene a cargo (como en otra parte decimos, tratando del buen Gobierno de estas gentes

Hence, taking into account the above information, it could be argued that from the 1500's to at least the mid 1700's, Europeans recognised not only that Pre-Columbian societies had achieved complex urban and architectural features, but also that these developments were evidence of the establishment of advanced social institutions, including political and judicial systems, all of them traits that confirmed the cultural sophistication of Mesoamerican cultures.

This state of affairs experienced a significant shift during the late eighteenth century as part of the so-called 'New World Dispute'. Indeed, following the thesis of a young, immature and intrinsically inferior America posed by the naturalist Georges Louis Leclerc, Comte de Buffon (1707-1784) (Gerbi 1993: 3), numerous *philosophers* not only brought scepticism regarding the sophistication of Pre-Columbian urbanism and architecture, but they also employed these arguments to deny the cultural complexity of Mesoamerican cultures. For instance, they put into doubt both the extravagant image of Tenochtitlán as formulated by Cortés and the mere existence of vestiges of Mesoamerican cities, Du Pauw (in Keen 1984: 271) substantiated the claim that Aztecs were characterised by anarchical government scarce of laws. Raynal (1770: II: 179-181 in Keen 1984: 274-276) also questioned the veracity of the conqueror's accounts; however, his major concern was to prevent Europeans from measuring the prosperity of the Aztec Empire by the description of its capital, since this society was but a perfect example of 'despotism'. In his short history of America, A. Hornot (1776) argued that Spaniards have exaggerated the number of Tenochtitlán inhabitants in order to boost the importance of their Conquest, whereas L. Genty's *Histoire Philosophique* (1788) affirmed that Pre-Columbian cities were but simple conglomerations of huts (in Keen 1984: 274-276).

The contribution of the Enlightenment to the interpretation of the urban and architectural achievements of Mesoamerica achieved its peak during the late eighteenth Century and the beginning of the nineteenth century with the publication of W. Robertson's, *History of America* (1777), C. Clavijero's *Storia Antica* (1780) and A. Von Humboldt's *Vues des Cordillères et Monuments des Peuples Indigènes de L'Amérique* (1810).

In comparison with contemporary Enlightenment philosophers, Robertson elaborated a complex interpretation about the Aztecs, their monuments and their state of cultural sophistication, which was based on a clear theoretical grounding and a systematic exploration of historical sources. To begin with, his model of cultural progression clearly determined that the scales of development of both urbanism and architecture were indeed markers of 'civilisation' (Robertson 1777: III: 277). Although his *History* dismissed most Spanish accounts of the Aztec Capital, it did accept not only that Mexicans had built cities, but also that the number and the size of these populations were indicative of the progress of this Mesoamerican society (Robertson 1777: III: 277). On the basis of this data, Robertson proposed that Mexicans (as much as Peruvians) were 'polished states' that had achieved a considerable development towards civilisation, although they were still inferior in respect to the peoples of the Old World (Robertson 1777: III: 278). In order to substantiate the later arguments, the *History of America* (1777: III: 285) supported the 'Black Legend': it claimed that Pre-Columbian cities had never been as populated and magnificent as the Spanish invaders had reported, since their chronicles were 'powerfully tempted to magnify in order to exalt the merit of their discoveries and conquest' (Robertson 1777: III: 285). Furthermore, Robertson (1777: III: 316) claimed that Pre-Columbian architecture was extremely simple: Tenochtitlán was composed by 'a number of low straggling huts, scattered about irregularly ... built in turf and stone and thatched with reeds'. Mesoamerican buildings were not solid or magnificent, but rather 'fitted to be the habitation of men just emerging from barbarity' (Robertson 1777: III: 316-319). As additional evidence of the lack of 'any progress in the art of building' among Mexicans, Robertson (1777: III: 314-425) argued that there was no 'monument or vestige of any building more ancient than the conquest' not only in Mexico City but in other areas of the New Spain that had not suffered the devastation of the Spanish invasion. The impact of these interpretations on British readers cannot be underestimated since the *History of America* was re-edited at least ten times in the United Kingdom from the 1780's to the 1820's (see British Library Catalogue).

Clavijero's *Storia Antica* (1780) contradicted almost all the views of the Enlightenment *philosophers* regarding the merits of Mesoamerican monuments by vouching the veracity of the Spanish chronicles about Tenochtitlán and supporting the idea that this was quite an ample city of approximately two and a half leagues, whose population was estimated to be 70,000 families (Clavijero [1780] 1987: 568). Furthermore, confronting directly both Du Pauw's and Robertson's interpretations, the *Storia* (Clavijero [1780] 1987: 568) stated that there were plenty

of vestiges from the ancient splendour of Amerindian cities, in places like Texcoco, Otumba and Cholula. The *Sixth Dissertation* was entirely devoted to prove that ancient Mexicans were not savages or barbarians, because '[ellos] tenían rey, gobernadores y magistrados, tenían tantas ciudades y poblaciones tan grandes y bien ordenadas [...] tenían leyes y costumbres, cuya observancia celaban magistrados [...], el arte de escribir [...] construir puentes y hacer cal' (Clavijero [1780] 1987: 568-598). Interestingly enough, and in contrast with *Philosophers*, Clavijero employed visual language for supporting his dissertations. Among the engravings published in his story, there was a bird-eye image of the Great Temple of the Aztecs, which represented a large pyramidal building made of solid materials, whose perspective served to emphasise its monumentality (Figure 58).

Unfortunately, Clavijero's *Storia* was first published in the English language in 1787. A second edition of this translation did not appear until the 1800's. Therefore, the influence of his views on Anglo-speaking peoples cannot be compared to that of Robertson's *History*. In addition, the engraving of the Great Temple of the Aztecs was a reconstruction of a building long-ago buried in Mexico City's underground, conditions that might have affected the image's documentary value as a legitimate and authoritative representation of Pre-Columbian monuments.

Figure 58. Great Temple of the Aztecs (From Clavijero 1780, in Bernal 1980: 76)

For these reasons, the more influential interpretations of Mesoamerican monuments immediately before the opening of *AM* came Von Humboldt's *Vues des Cordillères et Monuments des Peuples Indigènes de L'Amérique* ([1810] 1980), an *oeuvre* that has long been recognized as the 'main contributor for the raising of Pre-Columbian studies' to a 'high scientific level' at the beginning of the nineteenth century (Keen 1973: 336). Furthermore, through employment of a non-specialised language, Humboldt's *Vues* gained the 'broadest impact on the public imaginations of Europe and Euroamerica' (Pratt 1992: 119), an effect that was partly due to the profusion of visual recordings of Pre-Columbian monuments never before published until the *Vues*. Before, European audiences counted on a larger and diversified collection of images about architectural and sculptural Mesoamerican features, which were largely produced by local scientists and artists, many who counted with direct physical evidence for their production (Talavera 1999: xiii). In fact, the text emphasised the documentary value of the images, both stating their specific origins and using them as the central organising features for the written dissertations.

For the aims of this thesis, four images of the *Vues* deserve our attention: the *Pyramid of Cholula* (Figure 25), its *Masse Détachée* (Figure 61), the *Monument of Xochicalco* (Figure 62), and the *Ruines of Mitla* (Figure 63).

Humboldt's perceptions of Mesoamerican architecture were first and foremost expressed by the very title of the *Vues* and of some of these engravings: Pre-Columbian buildings were 'monuments', i.e. material evidence of the past. In addition, all the images provided visual evidence of the complex fabric of the structures, their solid materials and their monumental scale. Therefore, Humboldt combined visual and textual strategies to contradict the core of Du Pauw's and Roberston's argumentations regarding the lack of complexity of Mesoamerican architecture.

Interestingly enough, the *Vues* depicted Pre-Columbian architectural remains by following distinctive pictorial traditions. Each of these variations served to express visually particular points of Humboldt's interpretation of Mesoamerican monuments, their antiquity and the cultural complexity of their builders.

The general composition of the *Pyramid of Cholula* (Figure 25) corresponded to the tradition of picturesque landscape painting, which had a brief but significant impact on the history of visual archaeology during the late Eighteenth Century (Cfr. Lowenthal 1985: 174). This pictorial tradition was generally characterised by ample perspectives that combined nature and man-made features with idealised portraits of both locals and foreigners. By integrating wrecked, old or ancient constructions, picturesque paintings increased attention to their composition since, as Thomas Whately wrote in 1770, 'a monument of antiquity is never seen with indifference' (Macaulay 1953: xvi). The *Pyramid of Cholula* was a paradigmatic example of this tradition: the Pre-Columbian structure, which was set up against a landscape background, occupied the central position of the arrangement. A couple of human figures not only completed the picturesque character of the scenery, but also functioned as a referential scale. This referential technique served to measure magnitude; hence the engraving stressed the 'monumental' character of Pre-Columbian architecture, an effect that contributed to create a sense of 'retrospective wonder' (Lowenthal 1985: 137).

Picturesque representations of 'ruins' were attractive not solely due to aesthetic reasons, but also because, according to Western tradition, they inspired nostalgia, a sense of temporal change, and inspiration for historical recovery (Lowenthal 1985: 174; Jackson 1980: 100; Thompson 1981: 1). The engraving of the *Pyramid of Cholula* surely embraced these properties, by presenting the Pre-Columbian structure in its actual condition, thus stimulating imagination on its primal state. It also evoked a haunting sense of temporal remoteness and historical rupture, by showing that Mesoamerican architecture had changed after the Spanish (Christian) invasion, an event that was signalled by depicting a church at the top of Cholula's pyramid. The accompanying explanatory

essay emphasised issues relating to time –particularly the chronology of Mesoamerica, which according to Humboldt (1980: II: 41-43) began in the seventh century.

Humboldt's chronology regarding Mesoamerican antiquity was not new (Cf. Las Casas 1993: 189). However, the innovation of the Prussian traveller relied on providing scientific evidence to contradict the opinion of the Enlightenment *Philosophers*, who had sustained the idea that, from the physical point of view, America was indeed newer than the Old World, a statement that indirectly served to deny the possibility of a deep Mesoamerican antiquity (Gerbi 1993: 3-20). In fact, on the basis of stratigraphic, paleontological and geographical empirical data, Humboldt (1980: I: 11) was the first to prove scientifically the geological unity of the Earth. His essay on the *Pyramid of Cholula* in fact suggested that Mexican Antiquity was as old as the European ancient past: it stated that the construction of this monument began 'before the establishment of Northern European cultures' (Humboldt 1980: II: 43). Pratt (1992: 111-113) has recently proposed that through the *Vues*, Humboldt reinvented America within a framework of 'planetary consciousness' (Pratt 1992: 111-113). Such a perspective was certainly reinforced by contextualising Mesoamerican antiquity on a temporal, global scale.

Temporal issues were also at the core of the drawing of the *Masse Détaché* (Figure 59) since its title and visual content suggested the original building –the Pyramid of Cholula– was in an active process of decay, an inherent attribute of 'ruin' (Cfr. Thompson 1981: 1). The visual representation of a ruined fragment was emphasised by the presence of vegetation over it, a clear signal of its passing over time. In addition, this representation was charged with another powerful property of the notion of 'ruin': its capacity for providing incentive for returning to our origins through the stimulation of memory (Jackson 1980: 100). Accordingly, in the explanatory essay, Humboldt (1980: II; 53) wrote:

Este Teocalli recuerda más antiguos documentos a los que se remonta la historia de la civilización de nuestra especie: el Templo de Jupiter Belius [...] las pirámides de Meidoum, Dachour y Sajara [...] cuyos restos se han conservado hasta nuestros días, a lo largo de un espacio de 30 siglos

Humboldt's reinvention of American archaeology depended greatly on proposing cultural analogies between the New World indigenous cultures and ancient European civilisations. Indeed, as Keen (1973: 33) pointed out, his evolutionary framework recognised that Pre-Hispanic societies were of historical and physiological interest

Figure 59. The *Massé Détaché* (From Humboldt 1980: II: 8)

because they represented a ‘picture of the uniform progress of the human kind’. This perspective was also an innovation by Humboldt of the history of American Archaeology: the comparative framework of the *Vues* indeed broke a long-established European ethnocentricity of scholarly studies about Ancient cultures (Medina-González 1998: 63).

It is noteworthy that the articulation of worldwide cultural analogies by the *Vues* greatly depended on the incorporation of Mesoamerican monuments into well-established Western pictorial conventions for the depiction of ancient monuments. An example of this is the engraving of the *Monument of Xochicalco* (Figure 60), which depicted a wrecked building with fallen stones, missing parts, and growing vegetation, all of them pictorial conventions of the Western visual language of the ‘ruin’ (Thompson 1981: 1-3). However, this representation was not solely responding to aesthetic requirements. By showing a frontal architectural elevation of the Pre-Columbian structure, with a closed view to its ornamentation –whose details were stressed by an even, light illumination– this image aimed at a neutral, informative, and direct recording of past material remains. For these reasons, this representation also constituted one of the earliest antiquarian representations of Mesoamerican monuments known by Europeans. The origin of the image, as its accompanying essay explained, was coherent with its pictorial conventions: it was a reproduction of the *Descripción de las Antigüedades de Xochicalco*, one of the key manifestations of eighteenth-century Novo Hispanic archaeology (Alzate 1791 in Keen 1984: 312).

Figure 60. *Monument of Xochicalco*  
(From Humboldt 1980: II: 9)

Antiquarian pictorial conventions also characterised the engraving about the *Ruins of Mitla* (Figure 61), monuments which were originally recorded by the Mexican architect Luis Martin (Cfr. Humboldt 1980: II: 88).

Figure 61. *Ruins of Mitla*  
(From Humboldt 1980: II: 50)

Yet the main contribution of this representation was expressed in its explanatory essay: by stating that ‘la perfección [de las grecas de este edificio] no revela una civilización muy avanzada’, Humboldt clearly expressed his evaluation regarding the cultural complexity of Mesoamerican cultures. For as Keen (1973: 33) demonstrated, the Prussian traveller did consider that Aztecs had reached a higher state of cultural development than other American cultures, but denied the artistic value of Pre-Columbian architecture. Indeed, according to Humboldt (Keen 1973: 33) Mesoamerican monuments ‘had attained no high degree of intellectual cultivation’; thus, they could be just considered as ‘memorials of history’. Interestingly enough, as a liberalist, Humboldt proposed that Aztec despotism had contributed to ‘give monuments [...] that dark melancholy’ (Keen 1973: 34)

As explained before, the production of *AM* was greatly influenced by Humboldt’s works. However, the display representation responded to the wider intellectual debate regarding the nature and significance of Mesoamerican monuments, as it was shown in Chapter 5.

## Appendix IV

### The Legacy of the Nineteenth-Century ‘Exhibitionary Complex’ of Mesoamerica

My historical analysis of the early to middle nineteenth-century British and American ‘exhibitionary complex’ of Mesoamerica demonstrates that displays have been a powerful mechanism for the reinforcement and persistence of ideas. Indeed, the 1893 Chicago World Columbian Exhibition continued to represent Mesoamerica with objects, monuments and people, employed display technologies and conveyed certain images as its early to mid-nineteenth century predecessors had done. Of course, further systematic analysis of this and other World Fairs remains to be carried out, in order to examine particular issues of production, representation and interpretation that might shed light on the material, conceptual, informational, technological, theoretical and ideological innovations that International Exhibitions might have formulated and articulated.

It appears, however, that the legacy of the nineteenth-century ‘exhibitionary complex’ of Mesoamerica continues up to the present in different media. Some examples serve to illustrate this point.

As explained before, *Ancient Mexico*, Young’s display, the British Museum exhibits and the Aztec Show followed a diffusionist approach to propose links between Aztecs and Egyptians. Of course, they were not the only archaeological or historical products to support these interpretations (see Medina González 2003), but they certainly collaborated in presenting material evidence that reinforced their validity. Today, popular books still draw on these ideas and, more important, they attempt to gain credibility by drawing on the respectability of “Science” and on the authority derived from the Museum. For example, the popular comic, the *Angry Aztecs* (Deary 1997:19-20) explains that:

“Traces of cocaine and tobacco have been found in Egyptian mummies [...] the *experiments* suggests that the Egyptians had trading links with America long before Columbus crossed the Atlantic [...] The *Keeper of Egyptology at Manchester Museum* explained “We have always said that there is no evidence of links between Egypt and the Americans, but there is never any evidence until it appears” (*my emphasis*).

This book also draws on assumptions and perceptions elaborated in nineteenth-century displays of Mesoamerica: the image of Aztec religion is still reduced to the appearance of Aztec Gods and bloody ritual practices. For instance, the book describes *Coatlicue* as ‘Monster mother’ (Deary 1997:51) to refer to her ugliness. In addition, the cover of the *Angry Aztecs* visually



represents an ironic, but still rather ridiculous, image of Mesoamerican human-sacrifice (Figure 62).

Figure 62. Cover of the *Angry Aztecs*  
(From Deary 1997)

Current exhibitions of Mesoamerican material also reflect the legacy of display practices and representations generated in the nineteenth century. In the British Museum, Mesoamerica has long occupied an ambiguous area in the Ethnographic Department. Not surprisingly, it was the first ethnographic culture that was moved into Bloomsbury to be incorporated with the rest of the world civilisations. However, Mesoamerica still belongs to the ethnographic department of the British Museum. The interaction of socio-political agendas gained currency when the “Mexican Gallery” was inaugurated, an event that took place during a notable, but ephemeral, Mexican economic boom that

attempted to generate attention in Europe and North America. A group within the Mexican business community financed the exhibition (Tovar y de Teresa 1994: preface in McEwan 1994); perhaps, this explains why the gallery is called “Mexican”, even though it contains collections from all over Mesoamerica. The irony is that current national borders still shape our classifications of material culture in the museum context. On the other hand, the internal structure of the “Mexican Gallery” is telling of the traditional posture of institutional displays. The catalogue (McEwan 1994) and the gallery offer a summary of the cultures and then a description/interpretation of the artefacts which lacks awareness of the display framework that makes them meaningful. Since the nineteenth century, museums have assumed a certain position in a socio-political setting; they have also compromised their existence and structure to certain models of thought. These characteristics still shape them today, even in subtle ways. As professionals, we should be aware of this and analyse their implications, observing their genealogy.

More recently, the blockbuster exhibition of the ‘Aztecs’, which was presented at the Royal Academy of Arts in London from 2002 to 2003, clearly articulated the notion of ‘ancient civilisations’ by announcing that this was a ‘unique lifetime opportunity to experience the grandeur and sophistication of this once great civilisation’ (Σ:Aztecs 2002-2003). The spectacle was the result of a practice of ‘symbiotic collaboration’, this time elaborated on the basis of bi-national institutional and scholarly collaboration. Apart from showing a wide range of stone sculptures, terracotta figures, and stone tools, including those belonging to the British Museum, this exhibition presented materials from Pre-Columbian offerings excavated from the Templo

Mayor, a context that has been subject to systematic archaeological research since the 1980s. However, the display technologies and representations were not innovative. Models and life-size reconstructions showed the monumentality of Aztec architecture. The rationality of its display representation focused again on conventional topics, such as Mexica Gods, including ritual (and sacrificial) practices. Interestingly enough, the curators found it necessary to have a gallery on 'the Treasures of Aztec Art'. The dramatic fall of Aztec culture (and thus its rupture from the contemporary indigenous reality) was the topic of a gallery devoted to the 'Conquistadors'. All these topics were analysed in the exhibition catalogue (Matos & Solis 2002). The problem with these representations is not that they were historically or archaeologically untenable, but that they limited the understanding of Aztec culture, whose cultural complexity was also manifested in other (domestic) realms of life. Not surprisingly, one press review questioned whether twentieth century archaeological research on the Aztecs had modified our conventional views on this culture (Medina 2002). The details of the debate between this critic and one of the curators of the exhibition do not need to detain us here. It suffices to say that both of the interlocutors missed an important point: a systematic analysis of the display framework that articulated the exhibit. Moreover, both of them failed to mention that at the closing of this exhibition, a group of 'New Aztecs' were invited to perform a ritual dance to music that was said to be authentic, even though, as far as it is known, there is no evidence of this music being played during Pre-Columbian times. Issues of identity were also at stake at this show because the leader of the 'New Aztecs' argued that they were the true successors of the Mexica, a claim that seems anthropologically untenable, since all Mexicans are the result of the mixture of Spanish and indigenous cultures. Such a historical development means that divisions between Westerns and non-Westerns (Indians) are indeed a grey reality in Mexico that cannot be comprehended, as is true in places such as Australia or the United States.

Only last year and this year did Mexican and British curators once again join efforts to produce a display on Moctezuma. This example serves to address current political contexts regarding the making of exhibitions. Whereas the British version was comprehensive of the Mexican collection at the British Museum, the Mexican display was more humble, since local laws could prohibit the return of this collection to Britain. Both exhibitions represented Moctezuma, his life and the society that he ruled as transparent facts (McEwan & Lopez Lujan 2009, 2010). However, no systematic analysis was put forward on the conceptual, historical, artistic or ideological frames that have surely influenced the image of this important, historical figure: much information about these topics was presented marginally in the illustration's footnotes. Therefore, the twenty-first century 'exhibitionary complex' of Mesoamerica moves slowly from its neutrality and authority, implicitly refusing to accept its interpretative and thus, self-critical nature.

The idea of the degenerate/freak, Mesoamerican Indian, as the new interloper or descendant of an 'irretrievable' and 'decayed' Oriental ancient civilisation (see (Behdad, 1999: 26-29) continued to be articulated by twentieth century American sideshows. In 1910, 'The Ringling Circus advertised 'Tik-Tak, the Aztec Pinhead'. Photographs showed that other 'freaks' were presented as 'The Original Midgets of Mexico', 'Aurora and Natalie, the Aztec Pinheads' (Bogdan 1988: 134). The most famous of them was Schitzi, 'Maggie, the last of the Aztecs', who appears in the 1932 Tod Browning motion picture: *Freaks* (Fieldler 1978: 33). The relationship of the Aztecs with physical abnormality, even monstrosity, remained until the mid-twentieth century in popular forms of entertainment: a banner from the 1940s depicts an Aztec Indian as a ferocious black savage individual living among snakes and reptiles of prehistoric appearance (Figure 63).

The above associations were also articulated within academic literature. From the 1880s

Figure 63. A banner of the 'Aztec Indian' Show circa 1940  
(From Hammer & Bosker 1996: 86)

to the 1920s, scientists interested in mental retardation incorporated the category of 'Aztec' and 'Aztec Type' into their medical vocabulary (Down 1887, Crookshank 1920 in Bogdan 1988: 145). A long-lasting but differential effect of this phenomenon was the 1896 anthropological study by C. Starr that proposed that a pygmy race inhabited Mexico and Guatemala (in Comas 1968: 18). Today Mesoamerican people are still perceived as the ultimate 'Others', i.e. aliens, a term that some Americans employ to refer to Mexican illegal immigrants. In fact, the association of the Mexican illegal immigrants and extra-terrestrials was exploited in an ironic fashion by the movie *Men in Black*. Furthermore, the most dramatic battle of *Star Wars II* was set in an unknown jungle with Maya Pyramids. The blockbuster Hollywood movie *Apocalypse* alternatively reflects the obsession with the drama of the fallen 'ancient civilisation' within the Maya World.

Current popular and academic literature continues to formulate the metaphor of archaeology as adventure and work that aims to solve a puzzle, piece together the past, and live with a mystery (Cf. Shanks 1992: 54). Examples of this can be found in Fagan's *History* (1977) of the *Early Archaeologists in the Americas*, and of course, in the classic book of Ceram (1951) *Gods, Graves and Scholars*, which due to its popularity is nowadays sold as a mass market paperback (Ceram 1986). This theme of course survives in the most popular movie about archaeology, *Indiana Jones*. Interestingly enough, the last edition of the *Indy* series was about archaeologists resolving a mystery surrounding 'crystal skulls', objects that have a problematic, but fascinating relationship with the history of Mesoamerican archaeology (Walsh 1997, 2002).

Taking this legacy into account, it can be argued that historical analysis of display practices is not a matter of curiosity. Nor can it be considered an extravagant or luxurious form of scholarly pursuit. It gives us awareness of the theoretical and ideological underpinnings of archaeological representations/interpretations and their long lasting effects. On a more practical note, it serves curators to learn about representational strategies, their efficiency and their risks.

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